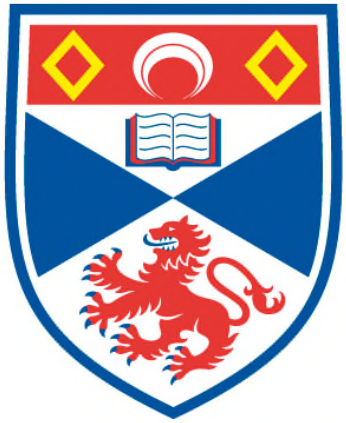
CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY AND THE MEANING OF LIFE

J. Edward Barrett

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews



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CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY AND THE MEANING OF LIFE

being a Thesis presented by

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to the University of St. Andrews

in application for the degree of Ph.D.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the following Thesis is based on the results of research carried out by me in St. Mary's College, University of St. Andrews, that the Thesis is my own composition, and that it has not previously been presented for a Higher Degree.

J. Edward Barrett

CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify that J. Edward Barrett has spent nine terms at Research Work in St. Mary's College, the University of St. Andrews, that he has fulfilled the conditions of Ordinance No. 16 (St. Andrews), and that he is qualified to submit the accompanying Thesis in application for the degree of Ph.D.

The Reverend Professor
EDGAR P. DICKIE
Supervisor of Research

ACADEMIC HISTORY

In 1956 I was graduated (A.B.) from Susquehanna University in Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania, with a major in philosophy and religion and a minor in psychology. While there I was elected to Pi Gamma Mu, the national social science honor society.

In 1958 I was graduated (B.D.) from Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, New Jersey. From June 1958 until September 1962 I was pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Glassboro, New Jersey. During this time I continued part-time graduate studies in theology, and in 1960 was awarded a further degree (Th.M.) from Princeton.

I matriculated in the University of St. Andrews in October 1962 and immediately commenced research on "Contemporary Theology and the Meaning of Life," which is now being submitted as a Ph.D. Thesis.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The extent of my debt to the Reverend Professor Edgar P. Dickie considerably surpasses what words can easily say. He has been generous with his time, gracious with his friendship, and helpful with his counsel. The range of his knowledge, his critical power and good judgement are combined with a practical ability to give effective guidance and prompt attention. To him I can only suggest my profound admiration and sincere appreciation.

Warm thanks are due to my wife, Suzanne, whose willingness and ability with tedious details of the manuscript have freed me to concentrate upon the content of the research, whose insistence upon logical clarity has often corrected me, and whose personal support and encouragement have always sustained me.

It has been a joy to work in the Christian community composed of the staff and students of St. Mary's College, to know the intellectual challenge and scholarly commitment of the University, and to live in the ancient and lovely town of St. Andrews.

DEDICATION

To my

MOTHER and FATHER

from whom I know

"Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends."

I Corinthians 13: 7, 8.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

I

"Meaninglessness" is not a new problem. Several centuries before the birth of Jesus a Hebrew sage wrote what is certainly the classical expression of the ultimate human frustration. Man's situation is such that God "has put eternity into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end....Whether it is love or hate man does not know. Everything before [illegible] is vanity."[1] Even a casual reading of Ecclesiastes will indicate the comprehensive extent to which it has all been said - even to the point of bitter resentment. "Consider the works of God; who can make straight what he has made crooked?"[2]

Moods within history vary from generation to

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1 Ecclesiastes 3:11; 9:1. Biblical quotations are (except when the translation is indicated as being that of the theologian under consideration) from the Revised Standard Version of The Holy Bible (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1952).

2 Ibid., 7:13.

generation, from century to century.[1] Doubtless there have been times when it has been relatively difficult to understand this Hebrew philosopher - times when a mood of at least cautious optimism seemed justified, inevitable, and even appropriate. But, ours is not such a time. Modern man is neither optimistic nor pessimistic. He is hesitant.[2] He has not committed himself to conclusions of despair, but he is tempted by them. Today, optimism seems shallow, but pessimism seems irresponsible, and man is again troubled about the meaning of it all, and asking with urgency: What is the meaning of life?

Certain of our leading psychiatrists have been particularly sensitive to the problem. Carl G. Jung, the very title of whose important book Modern Man in Search of a Soul indicates a keen awareness

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1 "It is perhaps wholesome for us to realise that this mood is not unique and unexampled. It will be good for those who are secretly rather proud of it to remember that it has manifested itself before, and for those who are troubled by it to know that it will pass. The writer of Ecclesiastes knew the mood, but he was wiser than our age in recognising that he was not the first to experience it. 'There is no new thing under the sun.'" Edgar P. Dickie, Revelation and Response (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1938), p. 4.

2 "Much is written in our time about 'the modern mind.' The real trouble is that there are so many minds, for the 'man of to-day'...has not yet made up his mind." Ibid., p. 3.

of the problem of meaninglessness, has described psychoneurosis in just these terms: "the suffering of a human being who has not discovered what life means for him,...[he] has failed to read the meaning of his own existence."[1] Indeed, Jung goes on to describe the question of the meaning of life as "the most ordinary and frequent of questions" which he has confronted in his experience as a psychiatrist.[2]

The most serious attempt to come to grips with the problem of meaninglessness from the standpoint of psychiatry is to be found in the work of Victor Emil Frankl, the successor of Freud and Adler at the University of Vienna. Frankl does not wish to depreciate nor disown the important work of his predecessors. But, "in my opinion, man is neither dominated by the will to pleasure (Freud) nor the will to power (Adler), but by what I should like to call Man's will-to-meaning; that is to say, his deep-seated striving and struggling for a higher and ultimate meaning to his existence."[3] Frankl sees "man's concern about a meaning in life which would

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1 trans. by W.S. Bell and Cary F. Baynes (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1936), p. 260.
2 Ibid., p. 264.
3 From Death Camp to Existentialism, trans. by Ilse Lasch (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), p. 97.

be worthy of life" as "the truest expression of the human nature in man."[1] He understands man's search for meaning as "genuine" rather than neurotic, as "spiritual distress, but not a psychic disease."[2] He asks just what happens when modern man "finds himself frustrated in this most human demand for a meaning to his existence" and describes this failure to find meaning with the words "'existential frustration' - this world-wide collective neurosis."[3] And again, "what threatens contemporary man is what I call 'the existential vacuum' within him."[4]

Modern psychiatry is not alone, however, in its anxious awareness of the problem of meaninglessness. "The Hollow Men" of T. S. Eliot sounds strikingly similar to the "existential vacuum" of V. E. Frankl. Certainly the problem has been one of the leading concerns of Eliot.[5] Man today, rather than deciding to live his life in terms of some great, high and holy purpose, finds

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1 Ibid., p. 100.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., p. 98.
4 Ibid., p. 111.
5 All of the following lines by Eliot are taken from his poems as indicated. See Collected Poems 1909-1935 (London: Faber & Faber, 1936).

...time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred visions and revisions,
Before the taking of toast and tea.

Indeed, "J. Alfred Prufrock" is such a painful expression of contemporary meaninglessness that, in a moment of irony, he reflects:

I have measured out my life with coffee spoons.

Eliot experiences contemporary society as:

The endless cycle of idea and action
Endless invention, endless experiment, [which]
Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness;
Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;
Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word....

And he longingly asks:

Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?

Western society is, in fact a "Waste Land," in which

We who were living are now dying
with a little patience.

There are indeed those who are aware of the problem. But, their voices come as

...dry sterile thunder without rain,

and Eliot hears our civilization epitomized in the words from childhood:

London Bridge is falling down
falling down
falling down.

Other voices in contemporary literature, from Kafka and Camus to Miller and Williams, speak with similar concern and clarity, giving the problem expression, if not definition.

It is, however, in contemporary atheistic existential philosophy that the problem of meaninglessness assumes fundamental and systematic significance. Jean-Paul Sartre finds it "extremely embarrassing that God does not exist, for there disappears with Him all possibility of finding" any *a priori* "essence," any "given" meaning in life.[1] "God does not exist, and...it is necessary to draw the consequences of his absence right to the end."[2] "Man first of all exists...and defines himself afterwards."[3] Thus, Sartre's summary statement of his fundamental thesis is that *existence precedes essence*. First, man is. Later, he may and even should decide the meaning of his existence. He is responsible for doing this. But there is no eternally valid or given meaning to life, "since there is no infinite and perfect consciousness to think it."[4] This movement, which has had such a wide influence upon the thought of continental Europe can only be properly understood as the philosophic and systematic expression of this profound contemporary problem of meaninglessness.

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1 *Existentialism and Humanism*, trans. by Philip Mairet (London: Methuen & Co., 1948), p. 35. The power of this simple statement of Sartre's philosophy is hardly surpassed in his larger and more comprehensive *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. by Hazel E. Barnes (London: Methuen & Co., 1957). Some consideration of Heidegger will appear in Chapter III on Bultmann.

2 *Ibid.*, pp. 32, 33.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 33.

II

In the research which follows an examination is undertaken of selected writings from six leading contemporary theologians to discover what help they give in answering the question of the meaning of life. The six theologians have been chosen (1) because of the varied positions which they represent, and (2) because of their obvious influence within the present-day church. No suggestion is intended that Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, Karl Heim, Reinhold Niebuhr, Henry Wieman, and Paul Tillich exhaust the term "contemporary theology." Rather conspicuously absent are considerations of Emil Brunner, G.C. Berkouwer, Nels Ferre, the "Lundensian" school (Gustav Aulen and Anders Nygren), and the newly developing "post-Bultmann" school (particularly Fritz Buri and Gerhard Ebeling). The six men chosen do, however, give some index of the broad and varied spectrum which is "contemporary theology."

The purpose of the following research is: (1) to establish a more precise definition of the question of the meaning of life; (2) to survey the answers to the question as developed within the thoughts of six

leading contemporary theologians; and (3) to suggest, by observing strengths and weaknesses, the kind of answer which, in the light of the more precisely defined question, is most truly a helpful answer.

The intention of the research is not, therefore, to determine what is the meaning of life, since such a decision presupposes a theological position from which judgement is made, and involves theological construction beyond the proper limits of research. This research is not self-consciously undertaken from a particular theological position, though, to be certain, one is present and eventually emerges. It is a fiction to pretend to complete objectivity, but it is also a fiction to pretend to undertake research concerning conclusions which have already been reached. To save the evaluation from subjectivity (an effort which, considering the character of the theological task, can only be partially successful) judgement will be made, in so far as possible, not upon the "truth" of an answer, but upon whether or not and in what way it is actually an answer at all.

The following four sub-questions or "dimensions" of the question of the meaning of life represent an attempt to give a preliminary, working structure to

the research. They are intended as "tools" to enable access to the reality which gives rise to them - the actual question as well as the actual answer. They do not represent an attempted scholarly definition of the question, as this is a formulation which should (and will) arise from the research itself and be expressly defined in the general conclusion. The following four "dimensions" of the primary question do indicate the manifold breadth implied in the question of the meaning of life, as well as the major forms in which the question is often popularly expressed.

1. The general or teleological dimension: This form of the question asks, "What is God's purpose for human life? Why has He created us? What are we meant to be?" It is a general question concerning God and the whole of humanity.

2. The individual or vocational dimension: This form of the question asks, "How does a man achieve a personal sense of meaning? How does he achieve individuality within the perspective of the general answer?" It is the intimately personal aspect of the question.

3. The social or ethical dimension: This form of the question asks, "What is the meaning of the individual's life for and in relation to the life of his neighbor?"

It raises the question of the relationship of meaning and responsibility.

4. The eschatological dimension: This form of the question asks, "What is the meaning of life in the perspective of death? How can life have any meaning when and if it ends? Is there no ultimate meaning in life?" It is the question of hope and eternity.

Rather understandably, no suggestion that these four sub-questions exhaust the question of the meaning of life is intended. They do, however, give some preliminary "shape" to a problem which by its very nature has a highly nebulous character, and they give the interrogation of each theologian a reasonably uniform structure.

However, the framing of a reasonably precise question (necessary if research is to be undertaken) must not (if research is to be undertaken) be permitted to become rigidly determinative. In seeking to understand a theologian's thought it is necessary to recognise that questions determine answers and the form which answers take in a way which can be considerably beyond and other than that intended. Care must be taken, therefore, to remain flexible so that the form of a question which is valid within one theologian's

system of thought is not irrelevant or artificial within that of another. Accordingly, an attempt will be made to allow the theologian to take some part in the framing of the questions as well as in the supplying of answers. In this way, a deeper insight is gained into the particular theologian's perception of the problem. The appearance of a particular doctrine (for example, "election") in the answer of one theologian will not necessarily be paralleled by a consideration of the same doctrine in the answer of another. Furthermore, it is to be expected that some theologians, rather than supplying a given "answer," will only give suggestions as to how to deal with the difficulty.

The primary task undertaken is research. Therefore, the emphasis and goal of all but the last section of each of the following six chapters is descriptive - a sympathetic exposition and development of the answers contained within the theologian's system of thought. An evaluation of each theologian's answer will be included at the end of each chapter, and a more general evaluation and summary of the conclusions of the research will compose the final chapter.

Criticism is never undertaken on subjects which,

though necessary for an understanding of the theologian's answer, do not compose the answer itself. For example, it is necessary to understand something of Bultmann's "demythologizing" program in order adequately to grasp his answer to the question of the meaning of life. But, the validity of demythologising itself is not at issue or under critical consideration in the research. Similarly, this study will not undertake to decide the issue raised between Hein and Niebuhr on the one hand and Wieman on the other as to the necessity of belief in a personal God. Doubtless, such questions are important, but they are necessarily outside the scope of this work. The critiques and evaluations may very well seem to be overly concerned with weaknesses, but this is because the strengths are, it is hoped, sufficiently indicated in the exposition of each theologian's thought, and do not stand in need of repetition.

Because of the breadth of the area of research, no attempt will be made to exhaust the material made available by each theologian in periodicals and minor books. No one, for example, would suggest that anything important is contained in Karl Barth's summer lectures on the Apostles' Creed published under the

title Dogmatics in Outline which is not treated at greater length and with more substance in his Church Dogmatics. The important thing to determine is not what a theologian may say about the problem of meaning here or there, but what answer is implied within the whole structure of his thought. In general, then, the exposition will be informed by and concerned with the major and more systematic works of each theologian. Most of these works are in English, but the German sources are indicated when appropriate.

In developing the exposition frequent and regular use is made of short quotations - seldom more than a sentence in length. This technique permits a degree of concise expression which it would be difficult to achieve otherwise, and which is demanded by the broad nature of the program.

> We shall best be able to guard against doing injustice to writers by sticking as closely as we can to their own writings, employing their own terminology and citing where possible their ipsissima verba.[1]

Accuracy in quotations (drawn from many books, printed over many years, on both sides of the Atlantic) has sometimes necessitated irregularity in capitalization and spelling. Apart from quotations, the text of the

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1 John Macquarrie, Twentieth-Century Religious Thought: The Frontiers of Philosophy and Theology, 1900-1960 (London: SCM Press, 1963), p. 17.

thesis follows Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary.[1]

A theological investigation into the question of the meaning of life must seek to comprehend the actual structure of the question at issue, to study the possibilities for a constructive answer presently available, to appraise those answers by the criterion of the question itself so as to determine their accountable value, and to clarify those lines of approach to a more helpful answer suggested by the research itself. It is with this task that the following chapters are concerned.

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1 (Springfield, Mass.: G. & C. Merriam Co., 1949).

CHAPTER II

The Meaning of Life

in the

Theology of Karl Barth

I

Probably no name is so well known in contemporary theology as that of Karl Barth. He has been a dominating figure on the theological scene for more than forty years. His role has been variously defined in words ranging from glowing praise to aloof disdain. But, no one denies the significance of his role or the power of his presence.

Whether or not in agreement with Barth, it is impossible to participate in "contemporary theology" and not come to grips with him. He is there, on the theological scene, a dominating presence speaking with force on every conceivable theological issue. Perhaps this is the most fascinating thing about Barth: He creates controversy, demands decisions, and, to a large extent, determines the "norm" by which men define their own place in the theological spectrum. No theologian of this century has caused so many of his contemporaries to disagree with him, while simultaneously causing them to take account of his thought.[1]

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1 A glance at the index of almost any serious book of theology will reveal that its author has spent considerable time defining his own relationship to Barth.

"Generations to come will be called upon to test and interpret" Barth's theology.[1]

Before examining the answer to the question of the meaning of life as it is contained in Barth's theology, it is necessary to consider briefly his epistemology. With few men is the path to theological knowledge so determinative. Indeed, Barth's answer to the question of the meaning of life can only be understood as the goal accessible to those willing to tread this particular path.

Barth attempts to begin and end the theological task on the presupposition of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. For him, this means the rejection of every attempt to discuss God apart from that presupposition. Beginning with Jesus Christ, theology may assume "its possibility on the basis of its reality."[2] It has no need for any "natural

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1 Charles West, Communism and the Theologians (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), pp. 234, 235. Even a casual glance at the size of the Church Dogmatics will indicate why.

2 Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God, ed. by G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, trans. by G.T. Thomson and Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), I:2, 3. Here Barth indicates his indebtedness to Anselm. See also his book entitled Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum, trans. by Ian W. Robertson (London: SCM Press, 1960), where he writes that "in this book on Anselm I am working with a vital key, if not the key, to an understanding of that whole process of thought that has impressed me more and more in my Church Dogmatics as the only one proper for theology." (p. 11.)

theology."[1] Indeed, any attempt by man to find "for his life either a clear meaning or a distinct purpose" in "the unsubstantial, unprofitable and fundamentally very tedious" imaginings of natural theology only testifies to the deceptive freedom of man to project the creations of his own mind into "the vacuum of utter abstraction."[2] Natural theology can lead neither to a confrontation with God nor an understanding of his will. Indeed, Barth judges that such undertakings have "not only little but no relation to God."[3]

Barth moves with vigor against every apologetic because he believes that "there has never been any other effective apologetic and polemic of faith against unbelief than the unintended one...which took [and takes] place when God Himself sided [and sides] with the witness of faith."[4] The result is that true "apologetics and polemics can only be an

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1 Barth's classical statement on this is contained in his "No" to Emil Brunner. See, Barth, Natural Theology, trans. by Peter Fraenkel (London: Geoffrey Bles, The Centenary Press, 1946).

2 Barth, Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation, trans. by A.T. Mackay, T.H.L. Parker, Harold Knight, H.A. Kennedy, John Marks, III:4, 479.

3 Ibid., I:2, 303.

4 Barth, Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God, trans. by G.T. Thomson, I:1, 31.

event, they cannot be a programme."[1] For theology, everything must and does depend upon the fact that God reveals himself. Therefore, there is no need for theology to "prove and justify" itself. "Doubts" there will be, of course. But theology must not take doubt seriously, and certainly not so seriously as it takes God's gracious revelation of himself - its only proper concern. "Consider [doubt] too long, and, like Lot's wife, we become a pillar of salt. We have to do something better; we have to do the one thing that is needful. We have to believe...in Jesus Christ."[2] We must not try to erect an intellectual foundation upon which we can stand. We have no other foundation than that which is given in and with his name. Upon this name we <u>can</u> stand. With it we can, like Peter, walk on water. Without it we, also like Peter, falter and fall. Faith is this "being suspended and hanging without [philosophical] ground under our feet."[3] It is trust in the God who can be trusted to give support. This God can be counted on to "maintain Himself if we

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1 <u>Ibid</u>., p. 33.
2 Barth, <u>Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of God</u>, trans. by T.H.L. Parker, W.B. Johnston, Harold Knight, J.L.M. Haire, II:1, 159.
3 <u>Ibid</u>.

will only allow the name of Jesus Christ to be maintained in our thinking as the beginning and the end of all our thoughts."[1]

Barth has a similar distaste for approaching theology with supposedly "relevant" or "existential" questions.[2] He believes that when such questions are posed "scripture is no longer able to say freely what it wills to say. It can only answer the questions put to it by man."[3] Whereas, "what it wills to do first is to give us with its answers the right questions."[4] All existential analysis aimed at achieving a "relevant" theology ultimately leads to nothing more than an "absorbed and domesticated revelation."[5] The fact is that "there is nothing, from the viewpoint of heaven or earth, more relevant to the real situation /of man/ than the speaking and

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1 Barth, Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of God, trans. by G.W. Bromiley, J.C. Campbell, Iain Wilson, J.S. McNab, Harold Knight, R.A. Stewart, II:2, 4, 5.

2 Barth is in constant polemics with the approach expressed in Tillich's "method of correlation." (See p. 367 this paper.) and judges that because of this approach Tillich's thought is "ultimately uninteresting as a contribution to theological work." Church Dogmatics, I:1, 60. This was, of course, written before Tillich's express formulation of his method in Systematic Theology.

3 Barth, Church Dogmatics, II:2, 41.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid., II:1, 139.

the hearing of the Word of God in the originative and regulative power of its truth."[1] Barth asks:

> Is it not as if [Jesus] wished to say to us at every step "What interest have I in your 'practical life'? I have little to do with that. Follow after me or let me go my way!"[2]

Theology must go his way. From this way, and from this way alone can theology expect light.[3] Theology must allow its dogmatic questions to "be dictated by the answers which are already present in the revelation of God attested in Holy Scripture."[4]

But, in what sense can Holy Scripture be considered revelation? Barth would "distinguish the Bible as such from revelation."[5] He believes that "there is no point in ignoring the writtenness of Holy Writ for the sake of its holiness, its humanity for the sake of its divinity."[6] But, just when we take the fact that it is a human word seriously, we find "that as a human word it points away from

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1 Karl Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man, trans. by Douglas Horton (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1928), p. 123.

2 Ibid., p. 38.

3 Barth, Church Dogmatics, I:1, 334. The unmentioned problem at this point is, of course, distinguishing Christ's "way" from Barth's "way."

4 Ibid., II:2, 3.

5 Ibid., I:2, 463.

6 Ibid. Barth continues: "We must not ignore it any more than we do the humanity of Jesus Christ Himself. We must study it, for it is here or nowhere that we shall find its divinity."

itself, that as a word it points toward a fact, an object."[1] This means that if we are to perceive the object toward which it would point us we must not attempt to read it "unbiblically." We must look toward that at which the Biblical authors are looking and toward which they are pointing.[2] These men deserve as much of our confidence "as we usually give to other men - but no more."[3] "The men whom we hear as witnesses speak as fallible, erring men like ourselves."[4] But, the fallibility of the witnesses is of no concern once the "object" toward which they point is discerned. "Jesus Christ is this object." He is the "object we encounter in the image reflected in Scripture." He is the object of their witness. And, "this object requires and justifies our confidence."[5] Theology is simply confronted with and limited by the fact that it is Scripture which

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1 Ibid., p. 464.

2 Ibid., p. 466. Barth finds much present-day "non-theological," "impartial," or so called "scientific" exegesis to be tragic insofar as "around 1910, this idea threatened to achieve almost canonical status in Protestant theology. But now we can quite calmly describe it as merely comical." (Ibid., p. 469) Paul Tillich speaks of "Barth's pneumatic-existential interpretation" of scripture. Systematic Theology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), I, 36.

3 Ibid., p. 491.

4 Ibid., p. 507.

5 Ibid., p. 740.

witnesses to God's revelation of himself in Jesus Christ. It is here, and not apart from here that this witness takes place with originality and force. "We cannot, therefore, free ourselves from the texts....We are tied to these texts."[1]

Barth notes "how energetically" Calvin set upon the theological task by wrestling with the Scriptural text "till the walls which [separated] the sixteenth century from the first [became] transparent!"[2] He concludes that "by faith" we come to the same "contemporaneity...with the witnesses of revelation."[3]

How is this possible? Barth's answer is that the Scriptural authors do in fact witness to an object, and in and through their witness that object makes himself known as a living subject.

> The God of Israel, and therefore the God who rules all things, is the Subject whose speaking and acting is the source and also the object and content of the witness of the Old and New Testaments. [He is the one who] spoke the "I am," and in speaking it actualized it for seeing eyes and hearing ears.[4]

Furthermore, it is important to understand that we

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1 Barth, Ibid., p. 492.
2 Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, trans. by Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 7.
3 Barth, Church Dogmatics, I:2, 7:40.
4 Barth, Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation, trans. by G.W. Bromiley and R.J. Ehrlich, III:3, 177.

have to do here not with a vague and nebulous "spiritual" experience, but with actual historical events of "concrete substance."[1] "We have to think of definite events and series of events which... actually took place at these periods and in these places, relating them always to the spoken and actualised 'I am'."[2] Revelation does not arise from the arbitrary choosing by theology of "objects to set up as signs, in that way inventing a knowledge of God at its own good-pleasure. It knows God by means of the object chosen by God Himself." It lets the scriptural objectivity "become a witness - yet only a witness - to the objectivity of God."[3]

What is more, the objective historical events, toward which the scriptural authors witness, themselves witness to a single event: "that concrete thing which is indicated by the name of Jesus Christ and not by any other name."[4] Here it is particularly important to take caution lest we slip into some vague Docetism. Jesus Christ is not some ethereal

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1 Ibid.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., II:1, 17, 13.
4 Barth, Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation, trans. by G.W. Bromiley, IV:1, 21.

being. He exists "with objective reality." In him, God exists "not only inconceivably as God, but also conceivably as man,"[1] and it is for just this reason that faith and theology are able to say anything at all about God. God has, in Christ, become "temporal and spatial,"[2] and not just an irrelevant "extra-mundane reality."[3] This objective, actual and historical Jesus, witnessed to in the New Testament, "presses in upon us, from its objectivity to our subjectivity, in order that there should be in us a correspondence."[4] As Scripture thus leads us to the living object of its own witness, and so to encounter with a living subject, "there takes place the work of the Spirit of Scripture who is the Holy Spirit."[5] The Holy Spirit is to be understood as this actual "coming of the man Jesus, who is the Son of God, to other men who are not this but with whom He still associates."[6]

Theology is that scientific discipline which

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1 Ibid., IV:2, 50.
2 Ibid., III:3, 178.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., IV:2, 303.
5 Ibid., IV:1, 723.
6 Ibid., IV:2, 123.

undertakes to speak of this God.[1] It may do so because this God has in fact become objective in Jesus Christ. It must do so because of the "sovereign freedom of the subject-matter."[2] Indeed, the "sovereignty" of the subject-matter of theology is just as important as its "objectivity," since "it is only as those who are mastered by the subject-matter, who are subdued by it, that we can investigate the humanity of the word by which it is told us."[3] Theology may and must begin and end with this God. It may do so "with confidence and without need of excuse."[4] True, theology is "broken thought" in that "it can progress only in isolated thoughts and statements directed from different angles to the one object. It can never form a system, comprehending and as it were 'seizing' the object."[5] But this must under no circumstances be thought to imply a

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1 The term "science" has a peculiarly haunting importance for Barth. See Church Dogmatics, I:1, 3, 315f; also II:1, 656 where theology is described as a "peculiarly beautiful science"; Barth, Dogmatics in Outline, trans. by G.T. Thomson (London: SCM Press, 1949), pp. 9-14 where Barth begins with the sentence "Dogmatics is a science."; and his more recent Evangelical Theology: An Introduction, trans. by Grover Foley (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1963), p. 3 which begins "Theology is one among those human undertakings traditionally described as 'sciences.'"

2 Barth, Church Dogmatics, I:2, 471. Underlining mine.

3 Ibid., p. 470.

4 Ibid., II:1, 458.

5 Ibid., III:3, 293.

freedom from rational responsibility, since theology will always be "a logical answer corresponding to the logical attitude of God."[1]

It is almost universally recognized that the character of Barth's theology is (or seeks to be) "unambiguously Christocentric."[2] "Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."[3] It is in Him that God "has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will."[4] Indeed, "he reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature."[5] Therefore, the name of Jesus Christ is not to be understood as "merely a cipher."[6] Everything theology has to say and to do is dependent upon it. "There are strictly speaking no Christian themes independent of Christology."[7] In just this fact lies the source of the theologian's joy. He need not become involved in the kind of circular discussion with himself which is the plight of those who attempt to reach knowledge

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1 Ibid., IV:2, 313.
2 G.C. Berkouwer, The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), p. 17.
3 John 1:17.
4 Ephesians 1:9.
5 Hebrews 1:3.
6 Barth, Church Dogmatics, IV:1, 21.
7 Ibid., II:1, 320.

of God through engaging in "logical or ethical deliberation."[1] He is freed from this. Freed by God in and through His gracious revelation in Christ. Therefore, theology must "from the beginning [possess] the presence of mind to venture the whole inevitable counterthrow from the Christological perspective and thus from the superior and more exact standpoint of the central and entire witness of Holy Scripture."[2]

II

The significance of this approach to theology for the teleological dimension of the question of the meaning of life - the general question concerning God's purpose for man - emerges with the following statement:

> Jesus Christ is the centre and meaning of the cosmos and history. As man has a share in the existence of the cosmos and the life of history, Jesus Christ is objectively the centre and meaning of his existence too.[3]

He who would know God's purpose for man must look for his answer to Christ who reveals God's answer.

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1 Ibid., II:2, 159.
2 Karl Barth, The Humanity of God, trans. by Thomas Wieser and John Newton Thomas (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1960), p. 46.
3 Barth, Church Dogmatics, III:4, 577.

But, to Barth, who deeply appreciates his Reformed heritage, this question about the meaning of human life is identical with the question concerning the "goal and content" of God's election.[1] For what has God predestined man? "What is this determination of the elect? To what is he elected?"[2] Barth regiments an impressive number of scriptural passages to help him approach this question. "Chief amongst such utterances is Ephesians 1:4 where we read that God 'has chosen us...in Him' (en auto)."[3] Barth's point is that "if we would know... the meaning and purpose of His election...then we must look away from all others, and excluding all side-glances or secondary thoughts, we must look only upon and to the name of Jesus Christ."[4] There is no room in Christian faith for a doctrine of election which appeals to mystery but in fact means an unknown God making an unknown decision concerning unknown men.[5] Rather, we have to do with a known God and a known decision concerning us. We have to do with something manifest

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1 Ibid., II:2, 410.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., p. 60.
4 Ibid., p. 54.
5 Ibid., p. 146.

in Jesus Christ. "He is the decree of God behind and above which there can be no earlier or higher decree and beside which there can be no other."[1]

At this point it is necessary to note a matter of systematic order in the Church Dogmatics. Barth discusses the doctrine of election under the more inclusive heading "The Doctrine of God." The significance of this arrangement emerges from the fact that Barth believes that "God's election of man is a predestination not merely of man but of Himself."[2] God's election is first of all the way in which God chose to be God, and only then is it a decision concerning man.[3] Predestination, as God's act, is the act "which determines His whole being."[4] God's purpose for man, therefore, is determined by His prior purpose for Himself - the way in which God elected to be God.[5]

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1 Ibid., p. 94.
2 Ibid., p. 3.
3 Ibid., p. 80.
4 Ibid., p. 76. Underlining mine.
5 Barth is completely unabashed at discussing what God wanted and decided before creation began - to an extent that, doubtless, would make the Supralapsarians and Infralapsarians sit up and take notice. For Barth's own evaluation of his relationship to them see Church Dogmatics, II:2, 127f.; also III:1, 195, 196 (trans. by J.W. Edwards, O. Bussey, & Harold Knight).

> In the beginning, before time and space as we know them, before creation, before there was any reality distinct from God which could be the object of the love of God or the setting for His acts of freedom, God anticipated and determined within Himself...that the goal and meaning of all His dealings with the as yet non-existent universe should be the fact that in His Son He would be gracious towards man, uniting Himself with him.[1]

The goal and content of man's election, the meaning and purpose of his life, are determined by this previous decision of God concerning Himself.

When the question concerning God's purpose for man is understood in relation to its proper foundation - God's purpose for Himself, his decision to be "gracious towards man" - then it can be simply stated that the purpose of a man's life is "to be the kind of man for whom Jesus Christ is."[2] All that follows proceeds from and returns to this fundamental answer.

In order to understand the depth and content of this answer it is necessary to grasp not only Barth's

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1 Barth, Church Dogmatics, II:2, 101.

2 Ibid., p. 410. Actually, Barth lists two other aspects of man's election which are to be understood as "included" in and with the first. They are "the fact that an elect man is...elect in and with the community of Jesus Christ," (Ibid. Underlining mine.) and the fact that "as a result of his election he is summoned" and "introduced to his serving and commission as a witness." (Ibid., p. 414. Underlining mine.) These will be discussed under appropriate sections of this chapter.

thought about God's decision to be gracious as the origin and guarantee of man's meaningful life, but also Barth's thought about the source and threat of meaninglessness. God's gracious decision and action on man's behalf takes place against the primordial dark and chaotic background of nothingness. Any really adequate comprehension of Barth's thought must take this background into consideration.

Barth thinks of "nothingness" as being neither God Himself nor His creature, but rather, that which exists in a "third way of its own."[1] Only in a third way can it be spoken of as that which "is." Nevertheless, it most certainly is. It is (and therefore exists) as "that which God does not will."[2] It exists only in a negative relation to God's gracious election. But in this negative relationship it does exist. It exists as that which God did not elect, as that which he rejected. "Not only what God wills, but what He does not will, is potent, and must have a real correspondence."[3] Therefore, it would be wrong to deny its actual existence. "Nothingness is

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1 Barth, Church Dogmatics, III:3, 349. German, Nichtige.
2 Ibid., p. 352.
3 Ibid.

not nothing."[1] It has "its own being" in which "a real dimension is disclosed, and existence and form are given to a reality."[2] "Its nature and being are those which can be assigned to it within this definition."[3] As this "third" reality which is neither God nor the creature, nothingness constitutes the Opus Dei alienum, the chaos, the origin of meaninglessness.[4]

This demonic nothingness contains within itself the possibility which when actualized by man constitutes his sin. Barth prefers to speak of this possibility as an "impossible possibility"[5] because the choice of it amounts to "self-annulment and... destruction."[6] Sin is this utterly wrong choice in

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1 Ibid., p. 349.
2 Ibid., p. 352.
3 Ibid., p. 349.
4 Barth notes that knowledge of nothingness "cannot be a matter of the insight which is accessible to the creature itself....Nothingness does not possess a nature which can be assessed nor an existence which can be discovered by the creature." (Ibid.) It is "outside the sphere of systematisation. It cannot even be viewed dialectically, let alone resolved." (Ibid., p. 354.) "It is disclosed to the creature only as God is revealed to the latter in His critical relationship. The creature knows it only as it knows God in His being and attitude against it." (Ibid., p. 350.)
5 See Niebuhr, p. 229 this paper, where the term is used with a totally different reference.
6 Barth, Church Dogmatics, II:1, 503.

which "the creature avails itself of this impossible possibility in opposition to God and to the meaning of its own existence" - the meaning which God has determined for man by determining him for Himself.[1] It is undertaking "to go into the void" of meaninglessness.[2]

Man has no need to make this demonic and perverse choice. All that he needs is the grace of God. But just this "deepest and most real need of man for the miracle of grace" arises from the fact that, as a creature, "he is in a position to cover up and hide from himself this need of his,...[to pretend that he is] not this needy man, but a rich man who can live without God's grace and who can even allot it to himself."[3] The consequence is that the "obviously outstanding feature" of man's life and history "is the all-conquering monotony - the monotony of... pride."[4] Man, in the absurd dizziness of his freedom chooses nothingness. God gives him the content

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1 Ibid. Barth believes that this fall into sin follows from neither the nature of God nor the nature of the creature. But, "without this possibility of defection or of evil, creation would not be distinct from God and therefore not really His creation." (Ibid.)

2 Ibid., II:2, 316.
3 Ibid., II:1, 130.
4 Ibid., IV:1, 507.

of his choice. He cannot find a meaningful life here, but only a meaningless one. It is not a positive possibility, but an utterly negative one. It is an "absolutely impossible" choice for his existence because it annuls his existence. "How else can we describe that which is intrinsically absurd but by a formula which is logically absurd?"[1]

Sin, then, is this "absurd" choice in which man "crosses the frontier" from the life which God in His gracious election has assigned to him, and chooses to go into the void. Simultaneous with the decision, man's life "is invaded" by the demonic reality which God has rejected, with the result that "nothingness achieves actuality in the creaturely world."[2] Meaninglessness secures a beachhead in human life.

And yet, precisely this nothingness - this "third" reality which invades the life of the creature threatening it with meaninglessness - is powerless to actually render man's life meaningless. Although nothingness is a threat to man, it is a threat which has been eternally conquered. Although a reality, it is a reality with a limit. God is that limit. In

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1 Ibid., p. 410.
2 Ibid., III:3, 350.

His eternal decree "God decided that the risk which He allowed to threaten the creature and the plight into which He allowed it to plunge itself should be His own risk and His own plight."[1] This is the meaning of the cross and the descent into hell. God "declares that the yawning abyss of non-being will not be allowed to engulf.../the creature's/ being."[2] Rather, and instead, God chose this awful possibility for Himself. The choice of the void has thus been rendered void and the possibility of meaninglessness has itself been rendered meaningless. The terrifying question of election or reprobation, of a meaningful or a meaningless life, need never be the concern of man. God has made it His concern. In Jesus Christ God "exposes Himself to the actual onslaught and grasp of evil" on our behalf.[3] In so doing, He conquers it. "In and with /Jesus Christ/ there took place the divine seizure of power on earth."[4] At the very point where man misses his destiny "God Himself intervenes."[5] "He takes the lost cause of man...

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1 Ibid., II:2, 165.
2 Ibid., III:2, 149 (Trans. by Harold Knight, G.W. Bromiley, J.K.S. Reid, R.H. Fuller.)
3 Ibid., II:2, 164.
4 Ibid., IV:2, 353.
5 Ibid., IV:1, 12.

and makes it His own in Jesus Christ, carrying it through to its goal."[1]

The consequence of this gracious decision and act of God in Jesus Christ is that the awful threat of meaninglessness "cannot again become the portion or affair of man."[2] Nothingness and meaninglessness may not and must not be held in awe. "It is no longer legitimate to think of it as if real deliverance and release from it were still an event of the future."[3] In Jesus Christ it has been "consigned to the past."[4] Indeed, "in the eternal glory before us it will not exist at all even as the past."[5]

This divine seizure of power by God in Jesus Christ is an act which is "ontologically decisive."[6] Man has his being in this decision and act of God, and has no being apart from it. Man's being *is* his being in Jesus Christ. "There is not one whose past and future and therefore whose present He does not undertake and guarantee."[7] Meaninglessness is not

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1 *Ibid.*, IV:1, 3.
2 *Ibid.*, II:2, 167.
3 *Ibid.*, III:3, 364.
4 *Ibid.*, p. 363.
5 *Ibid.*, II:1, 648.
6 *Ibid.*, III:2, 135.
7 *Ibid.*, IV:1, 630.

an actual threat because "Godlessness is...an ontological impossibility for man."[1] Of course it is true that in himself man "can neither mean anything nor do anything."[2] But this "man in himself" does not, in fact, exist. Man in himself is "an abstraction which can be destined only to disappear."[3] Barth wishes to take with "blind seriousness" the thought expressed in Colossians 3:3 that "our life is hid with Christ in God."[4] This fact renders "quite impossible and irrelevant any counter-question concerning that which might correspond to it in the way of human...life."[5] Man's so called "experience" is not the important thing - God in Christ is the important thing. If our life is hid with Christ in God then it follows that "our truth is not the being which we find in ourselves as our own...but this very being is a lie....Our truth is our being in the Son of God."[6] Whether or not a man knows it, Jesus Christ is "the Fellow of each man who exists and passes in his time."[7] Christ is "the center and

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1 Ibid., III:2, 136.
2 Ibid., III:3, 170.
3 Ibid., II:1, 149.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid., IV:1, 98.
6 Ibid., p. 158.
7 Ibid., III:4, 577.

meaning of the cosmos and history," and thereby the center and meaning of every man's life that shares and participates in the cosmos and history.[1]

On the basis of this Christologically oriented ontology, Barth is able to speak of "the vertical relativisation of creaturely occurence."[2] The creature is "moving towards a destiny...whose fulfilment it can only await."[3] God in Christ is the "constitutive and organising centre" of the world-process which secures, promises, and guarantees its destiny.[4] The Christian's one distinction from his fellow men appears at just this point: he sees God in Christ as the origin, center and goal of the world process, and "is simply made real by what he sees."[5]

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1 Ibid. Also III:2, 137.

2 Ibid., III:3, 170. Barth can also speak of "the horizontal relativisation of creaturely occurence." In this case "God co-ordinates the various events and the various activities and effects of individual creaturely subjects. He allots to each one its own place and time and function in relation to all the rest. And this means that we can speak of the significance of any one thing only in the light of its connexion with all other things. The individual thing is as it were a word or a sentence within a context. It is indispensable to this context. But only within this context can it be read and understood rightly." (Ibid.)

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., p. 241.

5 Ibid., p. 242. Barth believes "there are some creatures which do not need to have eyes for it because even without seeing it they are carried along by the power of this order and are secure in its peace." (Ibid., p. 241.) Compare with Niebuhr's "hidden Christ" p. 257 this paper.

What then is man's destiny? The question has already been answered, but now it can be answered more fully. Every man is meant to be "the kind of man for whom Jesus Christ is."[1] He is meant to be the kind of man who is redeemed from the power of nothingness, from a life of meaninglessness. He is meant to live as one brought "out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."[2] He is meant to live as a man whose existence is a redeemed existence, and therefore an existence lived in relationship to a Redeemer. He is meant to live as a man whose existence is an existence in covenant.

Barth is therefore able to speak of the covenant as the "basic purpose and meaning" of creation.[3] Indeed, creation exists as the formal or "external basis of the covenant" while the covenant is the material or "internal basis of creation."[4] From the beginning it was for the covenant that God created, and this fact is determinative to the end.

From the foundations of the world "the creature's right and meaning and goal and purpose" lie only in

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1 Ibid., II:2, 410.
2 Exodus 20:2.
3 Barth, Church Dogmatics, III:1, 340.
4 The sub-division titles of ¶ 41, see Ibid., III:1 42f., 94f.

this primal fact, "that God as the Creator has turned toward it with His purpose,"[1] and this purpose is the covenant of His love. "This is what God wills with him - to love him. And this is what He wills from him - to allow himself to be loved by Him."[2] There need be no "frenzied activity" in an attempt to discover or establish a meaningful life. This way lies only meaninglessness.[3] God, in his love, has established and guaranteed the meaning of man's life. Everything, therefore, must be understood in terms of the divine reference. This is what it means to be a man: "to be one who stands and walks and lives and dies within the fact that God is gracious to him, that He has made him His own."[4] Man is not alone. His existence is an existence in Christ, and this means it is an existence in covenant with God - the God who is love.

What then is God's purpose for man? The teleological dimension of the question of the meaning of life finds its decisive answer (within Barth's theology) in God's predestination of Himself in love

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1 Barth, Church Dogmatics, III:1, 94.
2 Ibid., II:2, 411.
3 Ibid., IV:2, 749.
4 Ibid., II:2, 558, 559.

for His creature. Man is the kind of creature for whom God in Jesus Christ is. Therefore, God rescues man from the threat of nothingness and meaninglessness which would otherwise be his lot. He thus destines man, in Christ, for a life in covenant with Him. From this it follows that the goal and content of every man's life is simply to be the kind of man for whom God in Jesus Christ is. "Obviously no man can be anything other or better than this."[1]

III

What does it mean to be the kind of man for whom Jesus Christ is? How does the individual affirm his part in the covenent of God's love?

Barth begins his consideration of the individual or vocational dimension of the question of the meaning of life by affirming that "election is the basis of vocation."[2] All that is to be said concerning the individual's affirmation of his own part in the covenant of grace is already grounded in the previous fact of his election by God.[3] A distinction is to be

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1 Ibid., p. 411.
2 Ibid., IV:3:2, 484. (Trans. by G.W. Bromiley).
3 Ibid., p. 486.

made as follows: by election God determines the goal and content of every man's life, by vocation He awakens the individual to his particular historical destiny.

What does Barth mean by the term vocation? Certainly not the mere "calling" to a particular profession or occupation, not the mere making of a living. Such a limited use of the term "vocation" misses completely the actuality of God's purpose for the unemployed, the elderly, the sick, and children.[1] Furthermore, it says nothing about the fact that every man must in some sense lead a life which is not identical with his profession or occupation. Barth, therefore, wishes the term "vocation" to be understood as involving "the whole of the particularity" of a man's existence.[2] Far from being "exhausted"by the more limited concept of occupation, vocation refers to the "divine calling" in "widely different spheres" within an individual life.[3] Just because vocation "is a matter of the totality of particularity," it is "impossible to conceive it at a glance."[4]

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1 Ibid., III:4, 549, 599.
2 Ibid., p. 599.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., p. 600.

Vocation must be understood as including not this or that sphere of human life, but the whole of human life. It is God's calling of every individual to an active affirmation of the whole of his existence.[1]

Of course it is true that his existence has an environment and a history. This fact is able to help a man discover his destiny in that by his historic environment "he is able...to orientate himself by what he has already been."[2] He thus knows already "the ground on which he stands and moves."[3] But, this must always be understood as "the place of his readiness for his calling and not as his determination."[4] "He is not identical with his situation."[5] Indeed, at any time this may be "astonishingly reversed in substance."[6] Time, and the fact that man's existence is a state of "becoming," make it necessary that man ever anew be "all ears for what is now, today, demanded of him."[7] He must therefore be prepared to affirm his existence in his

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1 Ibid., pp. 545-550.
2 Ibid., p. 596.
3 Ibid., p. 620.
4 Ibid., p. 621.
5 Ibid., p. 622.
6 Ibid., p. 596.
7 Ibid., pp. 596, 607.

historic environment with both "resolution" to its actuality and designation for him, and "openness" to the possibility of change.[1]

Furthermore, just as man's historic environment defines his "external limitation," so also his "personal aptitude," his "specific endowment and inclination" define his "internal limit."[2] Man must be understood from within as well as from without. God always calls upon a man to be what he is. Therefore, man must not attempt to escape from himself. He must not pretend to be someone else, or someone other than who he is. "The command of God is the call to wake up, to recognize ourselves and to take ourselves seriously in the totality of [who we are and] what we can actually do."[3] Naturally, what a man is in himself and what he can do may be wider or narrower than his present understanding of himself. He must, therefore, always be prepared to allow himself to be "pushed beyond" or "held back from" what he regards as the rightful limits of his aptitude. "As the command of God comes to him, God

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1 Ibid., p. 585.
2 Ibid., p. 623.
3 Ibid., p. 626.

decides and says where his real limit is."[1]

The truly critical thing about vocation is not the external sphere of man's environment or the internal sphere of his various abilities, but (from God's side) the divine call asking man to affirm his existence in and with both of these and (from man's side) the structure of human existence which we know as freedom. The possibility of a meaningful life for the individual emerges from the polarity of command and freedom, of responsible-freedom or the "freedom of obedience."[2] It is totally wrong to think of man's freedom in terms which, in fact, suggest anarchy. Freedom is not to be "equated" with an abstract "neutrality."[3] True freedom "is the freedom of a right choice," the choice which will affirm a man's creaturehood.[4] Man may live a meaningful life because he is free to choose "what

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1 Ibid., p. 623.

2 Ibid., p. 595. In a personal interview on June 24, 1963 Barth described "freedom understood as responsibility" as the "critical" ground for any discussion of a meaningful life. He then went on to define responsibility in terms of "Christ understood as the Servant - the man for other man." See his "Jesus Christ, the Lord as Servant" in Church Dogmatics, IV:1.

3 Ibid., III:2, 196.

4 Ibid., pp. 137, 130.

God has chosen for him," and thereby affirm his existence as God's creature "in the form of his own decision and act."[1]

The opportunity to live a meaningful life occurs at that point where God's summons to service touches the individual's capacity for responsible freedom. Indeed, there can be no responsible freedom apart from being summoned. This act of God, and this alone, has the possibility contained within it of man's life being genuine and real. "When the reality of human nature is in question, the word 'real' is simply equivalent to 'summoned'."[2]

But how does this "summons," which bears with it the possibility for the individual of a real and meaningful existence, actually occur? In what form and circumstances does it appear? Barth's answer is that the summons which makes a meaningful life an actual possibility for an individual always comes as an individual command addressed to the individual in every individual situation.[3] Its occurence appears

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1 Ibid., III:4, 595.
2 Ibid., III:2, 150. For a similar thought concerning "authentic existence" see Bultmann, pp. 95, 110 f. this paper.
3 Ibid., III:4, 11.

"in, with and under the demand" dictated by the external sphere of his environment and the internal sphere of his various abilities.[1] The external and the internal voice taken together "are the creaturely carriers and media of the voice of God Himself."[2]

Man's life in time is characterized by the process of "becoming." This means simply that God's command comes to him ever anew. He is summoned "each present moment, each specific instant, in his transition from what he was to what...he will be. The command of God concerns the form and content of this transition."[3] Barth summarized the matter this way:

> Man has to ask himself at least three practical questions: first, of course, the question of correct or obedient choice of his sphere of operation; then of correct or obedient existence in the chosen sphere; and finally of the possibility of commanded and therefore correct or obedient change or transition from one sphere to another.[4]

The actual discovery of God's will in each situation is not, therefore, to be thought of as intrinsically problematic. God's summons and command comes to man as something he may both know and understand.[5]

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1 Ibid., p. 636.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., p. 607.
4 Ibid., p. 634.
5 Ibid., p. 596. See also Bultmann p. 125 this paper.

It is something which "requires no interpretation to come into force."[1] From the beginning it is clear to the Christian that as a servant of his Servant Lord his summons will be a summons to service. If service is "the question which he puts, he can hardly miss his calling."[2]

The possibility for the individual of realizing a meaningful life "thus consists decisively and dominatingly in the fact that" he exists in "proximity" to Christ, his Servant Lord, "and therefore in analogy to what He is."[3] Man's "human heart and reason and acts are orientated on Him, i.e., on agreement with His being and action."[4] A man's life is meaningful when and as he is "conformed to the image" of Christ.[5] But this is just another way of saying a man's life is meaningful when he is in covenant with God or in union with Christ. Such "union

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1 Ibid., p. 12.
2 Ibid., p. 635.
3 Ibid., IV:3:2, 532. In the interview previously mentioned (p. 47 this paper) Barth described service as the "one word" which, when followed, can make an individual's existence meaningful. "A meaningful life is realised in service," he said, "and this fact is grounded in man's Servant Lord." See Church Dogmatics III:2, 210 where Barth writes that "in the being of the man Jesus for His fellows we have to do with something ontological."
4 Ibid., p. 548.
5 Romans 8:29; see also Church Dogmatics, II:2, 413-449 passim.

with Christ" is "the heart of the matter," the "meaning and goal" of his life and calling.[1]

An individual's existence is meaningful when it is grounded in and in conformity with the existence of God - the God who chose to exist as a servant. But, this existence in proximity to the existence of God means that the individual is "thus opposed by nothingness as God Himself is opposed."[2] He is "no more spectator." As God takes the threat of nothingness and meaninglessness and makes it His own, man is "summoned and empowered" to join in the struggle. Hereby "the creature can and will have a real part in the conflict with nothingness..., a part in the work and warfare of God."[3]

Of course, such service in the struggle against nothingness and meaninglessness will have a twofold character.

> For the power of God Himself, reflected in the power which He gives to man, is the power of Jesus Christ, and therefore the power of the Lamb as well as the Lion, of the cross as well as the resurrection, of humiliation as well as exaltation, of death as well as life. To this there corresponds the way in which God gives

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1 Barth, Church Dogmatics, IV:3:2, 541.
2 Ibid., III:3, 369.
3 Ibid.

> power, ability and capacity to man. The power which comes from Him is the capacity to be high or low, rich or poor, wise or foolish. It is the capacity for success or failure, for moving with the current or against it, for standing in the ranks or for solitariness. For some it will almost always be only the one, for others only the other, but usually it will be both for all of us in rapid alternation. In each case, however, it will be true capacity, the good gift of God, ascribed to each as needed in His service.[1]

No man's summons to service or sphere of service may by universalized or become a general principle of interpretation. This privilege belongs to Jesus Christ alone. Every man's life "will be meaningful only within its limits,"[2] and no man's life or service "will exhaust the meaning of this hour or time."[3] A man can truly understand only his own sphere.[4] He must not attempt to live in the sphere of another man, or dictate how the other man should live within

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1 Ibid., III:4, 397.
2 Ibid., p. 641.
3 Ibid., p. 633.
4 See Heim, p. 170 this paper.

it.[1] He is given to know and understand only his own particular sphere of concern, and he may confidently live and serve within that sphere knowing "that it is no accident but part of the plan and providence of God that it is [his] concern, and that God summons [him] to do justice to it."[2] His sphere of service, and the sphere of service of his neighbor, are "surrounded and conditioned by divine decrees of all kinds." Therefore, the limited character of his own sphere of meaning does not ultimately threaten his life with fragmented meaning. Instead it

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1 Barth cites his general agreement with Brunner that "faithfulness in vocation must exclude any intention of radically reforming life. We must not think ourselves summoned to clean up the 'places within the world' before we can decide to live in them....It is to be noted that in this matter of modesty the minister, especially of the Reformed Church, incurs a particular danger. We may leave it an open question whether Zwingli and Calvin did not sometimes expect too much of themselves, and therefore of those around, when they wanted to discuss and decide in all possible fields beyond their necessary ministry of preaching, teaching, tending and guiding the flock. There can be no doubt, however, that the man who is not a Zwingli or Calvin must not try to be a central monad in even the smallest village congregation...not even on appeal to the sovereignty of Jesus Christ over all areas of life....And he must not be surprised if in his desire always to have the first and last word he is not taken seriously as the universal fount of knowledge he imagines himself to be." (Church Dogmatics, III:4, 641, 642. For a critique of this aspect of Barth's thought see Niebuhr, p. 235 this paper.

2 Barth, Church Dogmatics, III:4, 642.

marks the actual area of existence designated to be meaningful for him. He has only to apply himself to this sphere of concern,[1] leaving the rest to other men who also have their limited spheres of meaning. Indeed, seriousness in his own sphere is possible for the individual only when he abandons pretensions at hubris and trusts in the "fatherly providence of God," ruling over all men.[2] Man, the individual, "can take himself seriously only in his relativity as the creature of God."[3]

IV

The individual realises the meaning of his life in service. In existing as a servant he is, in fact, existing in conformity with the existence of God. He is existing as the man for whom God in Jesus Christ is, and therefore living as a man whose life is a life in covenant with the God who Himself chose to be a servant. The meaning of the individual's life for and in relationship to God is realised in

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1 Ibid.
2 Ibid., p. 638.
3 Ibid., p. 613. Barth describes "full and perfect salvation" as consisting in man's "subordination in the co-ordination with /his/ fellow creatures which is ordained by" God. Ibid., III:3, 171.

conforming to the image of His Son, and so living in covenant with Him.

But what is the meaning of the individual's life for and in relation to the life of his neighbor? Surely, God's gracious election of the individual to be a covenant partner, and His calling of him to realize in service the conformity of his existence to the divine existence, does not occur in a vacuum. Rather, his election and calling have placed him "in and with the community of Jesus Christ."[1] What does it mean for the individual to be with these others? What has he to do with them?[2] In order to understand Barth's answer to the social or ethical dimension of the question of the meaning of life it is necessary first to examine more closely what Barth means by the term "covenant."

Attention has already been called to the fact that Barth understands the covenant as consisting in the servant relationship of God to man, of Redeemer to redeemed, of Possessor to possessed. The distinct

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1 Ibid., II:2, 410.
2 See Ibid., IV:3:2, 598 where Barth formulates the problem, in all its complexity, essentially as described here.

note in Barth's interpretation of this is the emphasis he places upon the covenant as a relationship.[1] From the beginning, "the meaning and purpose of God at his creation" has been "the existence of a being which in all its non-deity...can be a real partner."[2] This important fact about man's destiny to be a "counterpart" in relationship to and with God - expressed historically in the relationship of Yahweh to Israel and Christ to His community - has its analogy (on the divine side) in the Trinity and (on the human side) in the relationship of husband and wife.[3]

Now, "the first and typical sphere of fellow humanity... is that between male and female."[4] Here, we find "the prototype of all I and Thou" within human relations.[5]

> Man is directed to woman and woman to man each being for the other a horizon and focus,...a centre and source. This mutual orientation constitutes the being of each. It is always in

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1 Those familiar with Barth's enthusiastic denunciation of any analogia entis as "the invention of Antichrist" (Ibid., I:1, x) will find his alternative in this analogia relationis (Ibid., III:2, 220). "Man is not created to be the image of God but... he is created in correspondence with the image of God." (Ibid., III:1, 197. Underlining mine.)

2 Ibid., III:1, 184.

3 Ibid., p. 182-228. Also III:2, 203-324.

4 Ibid., III:4, 117.

5 Ibid., p. 150.

relationship to their opposite that man and woman are what they are in themselves."[1]

But, in a larger sense, the whole of man's existence is an existence in relationship. This fact is determinative in any attempt to understand him aright. Humanity is a matter of the "being of man with others."[2] Man is only truly man - a real person - in this concrete encounter with his fellows. His humanity emerges as this "existence in confrontation."[3] Therefore, it is possible to say that "I am as I am in relation."[4]

Barth describes with characteristic thoroughness what he believes to be involved in this relationship of "encounter" in which men become truly men: Being in encounter is (1) "a being in which one man looks the other in the eye."[5] He does this both to see the other and to let himself be seen by him. "This mutual look is in some sense the root formation of all humanity without which the rest is impossible."[6] Being in encounter calls for (2) "speech and hearing," address and reception. There must be genuine dialogue

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1 Ibid., p. 163.
2 Ibid., III:2, 243.
3 Ibid., III:1, 195.
4 Ibid., III:2, 246.
5 Ibid., p. 250.
6 Ibid., p. 252.

in which men actually seek to make themselves known to one another and seek to learn of one another. "I and Thou must both speak and hear, and speak with one another and hear one another."[1] (3) "If I and Thou really see each other and speak with one another and listen to one another, inevitably they mutually summon each other to action."[2] They discover that their existence is not merely with one another but also for one another. Each is meant with the other to "render mutual assistance in the act of being."[3] Finally, being in encounter is (4) an act "done on both sides with gladness."[4] It is undertaken "gladly" because it expresses "not merely the crown of humanity, but its root."[5] In personal encounter "each can affirm the other" with the result that "the co-existence is joy."[6]

The critical thought for the social or ethical dimension of the question of the meaning of life is, of course, the third point listed above.[7] The service which the individual must render in order to

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1 Ibid.
2 Ibid., pp. 260, 261.
3 Ibid., p. 260. Barth speaks with critical sympathy of Schweitzer's "reverence for life." See Ibid., III:4, 324 f.
4 Ibid., III:2, 265.
5 Ibid., p. 273.
6 Ibid., p. 272.
7 But, the others, and especially the fourth, is also involved. See below p. 61 this paper.

realize a meaningful life is not an abstraction. Rather, the call to service becomes concrete in persons and, more specifically, in personal encounter. Indeed, grounding his proposition Christologically, Barth can speak of Jesus as not living an abstractly divine "original humanity," but as being pleased "to be given the meaning of his life by" those round about him.[1] He exists "wholly and utterly" for them - having no more original, more aloof, more worthy sphere of meaning of His own.[2]

Of course, "Christology is not anthropology," and it is not possible to expect from sinful men action which is identical with the divine prerogative.[3] What it is possible to expect is a "correspondence" which consists in the "more limited fact that we render mutual assistance."[4] The individual "can be so near to [the neighbor] that his being supports though it does not carry him; that he gives comfort and encouragement though not victory and triumph; that he alleviates though he does not

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1 Barth, Church Dogmatics, III:2, 215, 216.
2 Ibid. In His being for others, Jesus "confirms His being for God" in that He reflects the "image of God." (Ibid., p. 219.)
3 Ibid., p. 222.
4 Ibid., p. 282.

liberate."[1]

Furthermore such limited human undertakings do have a mutual character. The individual must never suppose that in giving support he does not himself need support from others. "His action might seem to be very noble but it is not human if he really thinks that he can be self-sufficient....In this very likeness to God he becomes inhuman. In this apparent nobility he falls into the abyss."[2] If the "I" is not to be an "empty subject," the "I" needs the help of the "Thou" just as the "Thou" needs the help of the "I."[3]

This need for mutual assistance is not merely a matter of biology, sociology, politics or economics. Rather, it, like the whole of creation, proceeds from the prior fact of the covenant.[4] In concrete encounter with the neighbor the individual is summoned to service, and thereby given the meaning of his life for and in relation to the life of his neighbor. The summons is always specific, given in and with the I - Thou relationship. The possibility for a meaningful life is contained within this

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1 Ibid.
2 Ibid., p. 263.
3 Ibid., p. 264.
4 Ibid., III:1, 42 f. Also p.55f.this paper.

structure of relationship, this possibility of personal encounter, grounded in the covenant.

A final word remains to be said about the character of this service. For, according to Barth this "basic form of humanity stands under the sign that it is done...with gladness."[1] In a sense, "this is the secret of the whole."[2] A man may undertake his existence as a servant seriously only because of the previous fact of God's existing as a servant for him. But this prior fact determines that man's existence as a servant is simply gratitude - "the response to a kindness which cannot itself be repeated or returned, which...can only be recognised and confirmed as such by an answer that corresponds to it and reflects it."[3] It is, therefore, in joyful thanks that a man fulfills his true being.[4] His service as an individual is not a tribute to his own serious concern for others. Rather, it is an "inadequate response in the temporal sphere to the jubilation with which the Godhead is filled from eternity to eternity" because of Jesus Christ.[5] His service has the character of joyful praise.

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1 Ibid., III:2, 265.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., II:2, 413.
4 Ibid., III:2, 170.
5 Ibid., II:1, 648.

The joy of the Christian's service is like the joy of a child on Christmas Eve.[1] "Life in the world...will always be for him a really interesting matter,...an adventure."[2] God's gracious election of him to be a fellow servant, and so a covenant partner, "can awaken only joy, pure joy."[3] Such joy witnesses to the gracious glory of God. Man is summoned and commissioned to bear such a witness.[4]

> The angels do it....But even the smallest creatures do it too. They do it along with us or without us. They do it also against us to shame us and instruct us. They do it because they cannot help doing it....And when man accepts again his destiny in Jesus Christ...he is only like a late-comer slipping shamefacedly into creation's choir.[5]

This joyful witness to the gracious glory of God is not a matter of saying this or that. It is, rather, a matter of the individual doing the "natural thing

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1 Ibid., III:3, 234.
2 Ibid. See also III:4, 609 where Barth writes: "He who wants to be a child is not a child; he is merely childish. He who is a child does not want to be a child; he takes his play, his study, his first attempts at accomplishment, his first wrestlings with his environment, in bitter earnest, as though he were already an adult. In doing so he is genuinely childlike."
3 Ibid., II:2, 174.
4 Ibid., p. 414; also IV:3:2, 554-614.
5 Ibid., II:1, 648.

proper to him as the man he is in Christ and therefore in truth." In joy he believes, obeys, serves and witnesses because "he takes himself seriously as the man he is" and "begins to act on this basis."[1]

But, as a man who takes himself seriously as the man he is, he is not alone. He is, instead, an individual "in and with the community of Jesus Christ,"[2] and so, in and with other individuals. This community has the significance that it is in a mediate and mediating position with respect to Christ, his gracious election, and the world.[3] In and through its joyful service, and therefore its joyful witness, "the ongoing of the reconciling work of the living God in the world is included and takes place."[4]

For, as each individual in the community allows himself to be seen and known as he actually is - in his true, natural and factual existence as a man in Christ - others will awaken to their true existence. Following the joyful witness of the Christian to the source and origin of his life, men outside the church discover, and men inside the church rediscover, their

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1 Ibid., IV:3:2, 544.
2 Ibid., II:2, 410.
3 Ibid., p. 196.
4 Ibid., p. 417.

common humanity in Christ. "As they recognize Him, they can and should recognize themselves in Him, what they themselves are in truth."[1] Thereby, another man "willingly takes his place under the table, in the company of publicans, in the company of beasts and plants and stones, accepting solidarity with them... as a creature of God."[2]

The Christian's service includes witness, and his witness is thus service. The covenant is basic to all of this. From it arises the structure which permits encounter, genuine service, joyful witness and so recognition of the fact that the meaning of every man's life consists in his relationship to God (realised through grace) and his relationship to his fellow men (realised through the witness of joyful service).

V

What is the meaning of life in the perspective of death? Barth recognizes in the eschatological dimension of the question of the meaning of life a

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1 Ibid., IV:3:2, 545.
2 Ibid., III:3, 242.

cause for both irony and concern. For, it does appear that man's life stands "like a bracket with a minus before it which changes every plus in the bracket into a minus."[1] Death seems to hold this threat of rendering every experience of a meaningful life ultimately void. "There thus arises... with particular urgency the question of the relation of our existence to our non-existence, i.e., whether our non-existence in time may not mean our negation, or in what sense it has any other meaning."[2]

The problem is intensified within Barth's thought by the strength of his insistence upon the finality of death. Man is given to live in an "allotted time."[3] In that time he is in flight from his non-being and headed toward his non-being.[4] He is "proceeding towards a point where [he] shall be no longer," where he "shall only have been."[5]

Time, like space, is a form of God's good creation.[6] Man needs this "temporality distinct from eternity" to set him apart as a creature before his

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1 Ibid., III:2, 597.
2 Ibid., p. 538.
3 Ibid., pp. 553 f.
4 Ibid., pp. 587.
5 Ibid., pp. 587, 588.
6 Ibid., II:1, 612.

Creator.[1] It is "proper to him."[2] Time stands in contradistinction to eternity in that eternity, far from being the created form or mode in which God exists, is simply the way God exists.[3] Eternity is not merely an infinite extension of time, but is qualitatively different from time. Time, as we know it, denies to man the quality of presentness. His present is but a mathematical point between his past and his future, "but a step from darkness to darkness, from the 'no longer' to the 'not yet.'"[4] Barth concludes that "this, strictly speaking... is no time at all."[5] It is only the mark of man's finitude. Eternity has the distinction that while possessing past and future it is not itself possessed, "qualified, dominated, and separated by them."[6] It is characterised by genuine presentness, "beginning, middle and end in fullness,...all three simultaneously."[7] It is a possibility that belongs to God alone. Man, however, comes from his not-having-been in the past, exits in a fleeting present without duration, and

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1 Ibid., III:2, 438.
2 Ibid., p. 561.
3 Ibid., II:1, 608 f.
4 Ibid., III:2, 514.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid., p. 610.
7 Ibid., p. 558.

hurries toward his future being-no-longer.

Of course, it is his future being-no-longer which is hardest for him to bear. And indeed, Barth finds this fact to be of great theological significance. Man's death is different from his birth. His death "is the sign of divine judgement," and therefore, "man as he naturally is can face it only with sorrow." Barth concludes that "if we are to tackle honestly the question of the meaning of the finitude of our time, this is the first thing to see and accept."[1]

But as the "sign" of divine judgement upon man's sin and unfaithfulness, it is merely and simply the sign - it is not the judgement itself.[2] In Jesus Christ God himself has borne the actual judgement. In the terrible reality of Christ's death He has suffered for men the terrible reality of their own. The whole picture of gloom thus changes to joy if we are concerned not with the limits of our life "but with the God who limits it."[3] This fact confronts us with the second thing to see and accept

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1 Ibid., p. 598. Underlining mine.
2 Ibid., pp. 614, 629.
3 Ibid., pp. 564, 621.

concerning the meaning of man's life in the perspective of his death: "even in our death He will in some way be the gracious God and for us."[1] Indeed, "Death is our frontier. But our God is the frontier even of our death."[2]

It is still true that "one day we shall cease to be," but the significance of this truth is radically changed once it is realized that "even then He will be for us."[3] He awaits us at our end, and just this fact gives our "transience its seriousness."[4] "He takes an eternal interest in our temporal existence," an interest which is "enduring and faithful."[5]

In Jesus Christ God has made our limited time His own concern. Christ is "at once the centre and the beginning and end of all the times of all the life times of all men."[6] This means that the time of Jesus Christ is both like our time and different from our time; it includes both the time of man and the time of God, both finite time and the time of eternity.[7] For this reason Christ may be called and is the Lord

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1 Ibid., p. 810. Underlining mine.
2 Ibid., p. 811.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., III:4, 592.
5 Ibid., p. 593.
6 Ibid., III:2, 440.
7 Ibid., p. 463 f.

of time, or, more personally, the Lord of our time.[1] It is God's presence (as the Lord of time) in our present which makes our present real and meaningful.[2] "The will and act of God are the meaning and ground... of our being in time."[3]

In Jesus Christ we learn that the Lord of time is the gracious God, and that the gracious God is the Lord of time. This means that the gracious God, the God who is for us, is also the Lord of our death. Death can only be his "servant and slave."[4] This "obviously" means that "in the midst of death we are not only in death but already out of its clutches and victorious over it, not of ourselves but of God."[5]

Eternal life after all? Yes! - and no![6] One day man will indeed exist only in the past tense. But because the gracious God is his God, he will "be real even in this tense."[7] God will not "lose him."[8] He will not let him go. Man will enter eternal life,

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1 Ibid., p. 512.
2 Ibid., p. 531.
3 Ibid., p. 545.
4 Ibid., p. 609.
5 Ibid., p. 610.
6 What Barth intends to say amid all that he does say on this matter is difficult to determine with unqualified assurance.
7 Barth, Church Dogmatics, III:2, 538.
8 Ibid., III:2, 624. See also pp. 587 f.

and so will enter a "present without a future."[1] His finite life will be *eternalised* before God.[2] It is important to understand that it is his *limited*, "temporal being" that, in and through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, is "clothed with eternal life."[3] Both through creation and redemption our time "is embedded in eternity."[4] Therefore, when we die we enter "the further side...of our whole being in time."[5] Our life gains presentness in His Eternity, but it does not thereby gain time.[6] Men will not gain another life which would render this life a mere shadowy existence to be cast off and forgotten. No! He looks toward the "glorification...of his natural and lawful this-sided, finite and mortal being."[7] It is this earthly life "above and beyond which there is no other" which, redeemed, reconciled and glorified,[8] finds

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1 *Ibid.*, III:2, 624. See also pp. 587 f.
2 This term is Barth's, though he uses the present participle. *Ibid.*, p. 624.
3 *Ibid.*, III:4, 594.
4 *Ibid.*, III:2, 568.
5 *Ibid.*, p. 543.
6 *Ibid.*, p. 539.
7 *Ibid.*, p. 633.
8 *Ibid.*

fellowship with God and presentness in His eternity.[1]

What is the meaning of life in the perspective of death when life and death are understood as Barth understands them? Barth is emphatic that it is just this understanding of death which allows the possibility of our life being meaningful. "What is the meaning for man of dying and ceasing to be?"[2] Barth asks this question under a sub-section entitled "The Unique Opportunity." Were man's life to continue forever all the immediacy of the "unique opportunity" to live a meaningful life would be continuously postponed. Man the finite creature faces a "too late,"[3] and this fact confronts him with an "urgency which would obviously be lacking"[4] if he were to continue forever. The reality of man's finitude is therefore "most important" for any consideration of ethics.[5] Man has only this one, earthly life to live

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1 Ibid., p. 624. "Barth's conception of the 'eternalising' of our ending life has, so far as I know, no antecedents in the history of Christian doctrine." Berkouwer, op. cit., p. 158. Berkouwer's discussion of this and other aspects of Barth's theology can only be described as excellent. See also J.B. Soucek's "Man in the Light of the Humanity of Jesus" in The Scottish Journal of Theology, Mar., 1949, p. 81.

2 Barth, Church Dogmatics, III:4, 593.

3 Ibid., p. 591.

4 Ibid., III:2, 633.

5 Ibid.

meaningfully. But just because the God who will judge the meaning of every man's life is the God who has already redeemed him, man does not need to live in anxious fear concerning the matter. He need take seriously only the seriousness with which God has dealt with his sin and the threat of meaninglessness. "How can there be anything but freedom and joy?"[1] - the freedom of one who has had the meaning of his life secured and guaranteed, the joy of one who is permitted to serve, and so to live meaningfully.

VI

Barth's answer to the question of the meaning of life lends itself to easy summary:

I. God has, from the foundations of the world, destined Himself to be the kind of God who rescues man from the threat of meaninglessness. In Jesus Christ, God has decisively conquered this threat. He has appeared as the Servant-Lord, the Servant who (for man) is Victor.

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1 Ibid., III:4, 592.

II. Man realizes the meaning of his life by gratefully joining the Victor's side, by being the kind of man for whom the battle has been won, by living in covenant with the Victor.

III. Man joins the Victor's side by approximating agreement with the Victor's being - that is, the being of a servant.

IV. He actualizes this existence as a servant in response to God's summons, in concrete encounter with his neighbor.

V. In so doing, he actually participates in the divine struggle and victory over meaninglessness.

VI. His finite participation in the victory is "eternalized" before God.

The structural beauty of Barth's answer, the way the parts relate to one another and follow logically from one another, is a matter which can hardly be challenged. Whether or not a man is able and willing to embrace this answer wholly or partially as his own, it is impossible not to recognize in it penetrating insights which are unambiguously Christian. Yet, the

very Christo-centric reference which gives power, organization and authority to Barth's answer also contains within itself its own weaknesses, ambiguities and grounds for doubt.

The whole of Barth's answer builds upon the proposition that God has in fact already conquered meaninglessness, that Christ is the Victor over the threat to a meaningful life. But, the problem for many people is surely that this proposition can not be so easily supposed. Indeed, if this proposition can be taken for granted by an individual, then it is certain that for him the existential importance of the question of the meaning of life will not arise. But the fact is that, for many people, it does arise. And this fact threatens (though only threatens) the whole of Barth's answer with meaninglessness.

Barth's entire discussion takes place in an atmosphere of victory in which the problem of meaninglessness is proclaimed to be not-a-problem because God has overcome it. The difficulty inherent in this position is that there is no criterion for determining whether or not it is true. No appeal can be made either to the world of objective fact, or to the subjective world in which a man experiences himself.

Indeed, these references are the very ones which raise the problem of meaninglessness. But, without some sort of evidence, grounded in human experience, it is impossible to even attempt to determine the truth of Barth's proposition, it is impossible to distinguish it from his own state of mind, it is impossible to know if the issue at hand is the ultimate truth, or simply the fanciful product of Barth's imagination.[1] Difficulty is encountered in attempting to avoid the conclusion that Barth's fundamental answer reads like counsels of optimism arbitrarily founded.

Barth's position on this matter is that the only effective argument for faith is that which now and again God Himself gives.[2] This is an appeal to what is known in classical reformed theology as the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit. It certainly contains the truth that unless God Himself is present in and expressed by the answer to the question of the meaning of life, that answer is itself certain to be experienced as empty and meaningless. Surely, no answer to the question of meaning can be <u>meaning-ful</u> which is not in some sense

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1 Barth, of course, engages in extensive exegesis. But then, so do most other theologians.
2 See p. 19 this paper.

"filled" with God. It needs to be pointed out, however, that the constructive aspect of this thought does not say anything other than that a good answer is a good answer and one that is not so good is not so good. Of course, Barth (like the Reformed Fathers) wishes to go beyond this. In referring to the testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum he would appeal to the freedom of God to confirm the truth where and when He pleases. But this appeal seems very much like saying that God conquers meaninglessness where and when he pleases, and so contradicts Barth's fundamental proposition that God has already won the battle for all men. It needs to be asked in what sense Jesus can be said to be the victor over meaninglessness when and if he is not experienced as the victor over meaninglessness - that is, when the question still remains.

With particular reference to Barth's doctrine of election (which, as has already been noted, has an intimate relationship to the question at hand),[1] Brunner likens Barth's understanding of man to a sinking ship which, because it is in shallow water, can not in fact sink;[2] and Berkouwer

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1 See pp. 29 f. this paper.

2 Emil Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of God: Dogmatics: Vol. I, trans. by Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1950), p. 351.

draws an analogy from a town which, in war, has in fact been captured, though all of the citizens do not yet know of the capitulation.[1] For this understanding of man's situation to be meaningful, everything depends upon the acceptance of a prior bit of information (the actual situation behind the apparent one), the truth of which is not objectively determinable, and in support of which no circumstantial evidence drawn from the realm of general human experience is available.

Barth recommends not taking seriously the admitted ambiguities concerning the question of meaning present in the objective and subjective worlds. He suggests that the only true seriousness is taking "seriously the fact that Jesus is Victor."[2] But surely this recommendation is to be suspect as a theological short-cut clothed in piety. In a twentieth century world conditioned (in its better moments) to making decisions on the basis of evidence, does this recommendation of Barth not read like an arrogant retreat into obscurantism? The fundamental proposition which Barth uses to make his whole answer meaningful is precisely the proposition which, from

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1 G.C. Berkouwer, op. cit., p. 265.
2 Barth, Church Dogmatics, III:3, 364.

the beginning, is in question. Thus Barth's answer approaches being not-an-answer at all, but a begging of the question.

It is just possible,[1] however, that Barth has overstated his own intention when announcing the universal victory of Christ over nothingness and meaninglessness, and that what he means to say is that God in Christ is able to and will conquer meaninglessness for all men who will join Him in the battle against the negative forces.[2] In this situation the actual

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1 Strong support for the suggestion which follows can be found in Church Dogmatics, II:2, 175-194, in which God is described as the "living God." But this theme appears and disappears in Barth's thought with confusing irregularity, and it does not determine the general character of his theology with its "once for all...ontologically decisive" emphasis.

2 Barth's statement that the Christian man actually participates in the struggle against nothingness and meaninglessness suggests that he may not intend the proclaimed triumph to have quite the force which his words, in fact, give it. It is one of the interesting features of the Church Dogmatics that, while God's universal triumph is indeed its theme, there does occasionally occur a passage indicating that the triumph may not be quite so universal, and salvation quite so unequivocally guaranteed. See p. 34 this paper where the "impossible possibility" of going into the void is only described as impossible in that it is absurd, amounting to "self annulment." Compare this with the "ontologically decisive" note on p. 38 Barth's position, amid overstatement, seems to be that the negative possibility is a possibility, but that this possibility is not the Church's message and dogmatics has no business discussing it. See Barth, II:2, 477, and The Humanity of God, pp. 61, 62. The implications of this negative possibility receive no systematic attention by Barth, and any systematic attention to it makes Barth's system appear unsystematic.

conquest of meaninglessness would take place in the context of a living relationship rather than being presupposed as a prior accomplished fact to which a man may awaken. What God guarantees for man is the possibility of a meaningful life. Man's actual experience of meaninglessness would then indicate that he is on the front line of battle against the forces of nothingness, and is asked there to approximate the existence of his Servant God in concrete service to his fellow man, and thus living so that his life is meaningful for his neighbor, to participate in a finite way in the continuous victory of God over nothingness, of meaning over meaninglessness. In this case a man could be invited to take the form of a servant, and see if in his own experience the problem of meaninglessness is not in some sense for him overcome. This modified approach could lend considerable credence to Barth's answer without changing its general content.[1] To begin with the invitation to service may very well lead to the experience that God is already working mightily. It is difficult to see, however, how it could lead to the arbitrary

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1 The extent to which this modification would alter Barth's whole system is not under consideration. Changes there would have to be. But the general character and structure would not be threatened.

dogmatic conclusion that the victory is already accomplished. For this would render human service meaningless, which Barth does not want to do, though at times he seems to reduce the content of human service to a chorus of praise.

It is actually Barth's prejudice against an epistemology grounded in experience - his insistence that theology be understood as proclamation of "revelation" rather than the self-understanding of discipleship - that places his answer to the question of the meaning of life in an unnecessarily weak position.[1] If Barth were to allow his own penetrating insight into the steps involved in personal "encounter" to become determinative for his own theological method, if he were to deal in constructive seriousness, in dialogue, with the questions haunting human existence, his theology would probably appear less imaginative, but would certainly be less arbitrary, and so would be both more convincing and more helpful.

As it presently stands, however, Barth's proposal that theology be an independent science of "revelation" results: (1) in its independence from verification,

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1 "Barth's fixed point, his absolute, is revelation, God breaking through, God's Word. But he is hampered by the fact that it is not easy to know when it *is* revelation." See Edgar P. Dickie, *Revelation and Response* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1938), p. 210.

so that it is not possible to determine whether or not his answer should be embraced by the intellect; and (2) its independence from some of the very human experiences (the search for truth and the integration of what is known) about which the question of the meaning of life is concerned. Consequently, his answer is not really very helpful.

The question of the meaning of life is asking for an understanding of the experiences which compose human life. To be helpful, an answer must lead to an understanding of these experiences, and to the extent that it fails to do so, it is not really an answer at all, for it has not considered seriously what "life" is referring to when the question of the meaning of life is asked.

One of the characteristically human experiences with which an answer is asked to reckon is the fact-informed intellect itself, in all its concern for verification and integration of the theological answer with the facts of experience. Indeed, the rational intellect is of first importance because every answer is received through it, and no answer can be very helpful which the intellect does not embrace as acceptable. Personal conviction can not

come to the whole person when the empirically and realistically minded intellect, along with the knowledge it has acquired, is ignored. For then, any answer places itself beyond the human conditions necessary for whole-hearted conviction, and renders itself irrelevant to the very human faculty which formulates and asks the question.

A satisfactory answer to the question of the meaning of life must, therefore, seek to describe and interpret the experiences which compose life in such a way that the answer may be embraced by the intellect because it seems *in fact* to describe and interpret those experiences. The description must carry in itself the convincing force of truth. There must be what Edgar P. Dickie calls "conviction which arises *from the coercive element in reality*,"[1] and this is not likely to occur in isolation from and in contradiction to that which is *experienced* as reality. That God in Christ has already universally conquered the power and threat of meaninglessness hardly has the convincing force of fact, for if it were true the question of meaning would

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1 Edgar P. Dickie, *God is Light* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1953), p. 37.

never appear. But, although Barth begins at this untenable point, the general success of his answer does not depend upon this point. Indeed, when an invitation to service is made the starting point, a mild corrective is inserted qualifying the Christus Victor theme, and rendering Barth's answer a more tenable possibility.

CHAPTER III

The Meaning of Life

in the

Theology of Rudolf Bultmann

I

The name of Rudolf Bultmann has become intimately associated with his suggested program for "demythologising" the New Testament. This is as it should be, for in his programmic essay of 1940 Bultmann unambiguously defines "demythologising" as the road he proposes to tread.[1] Nevertheless, the motif which is decisive for Bultmann's thought is not the decision to demythologise, but his previous philosophical orientation.[2] He consciously stands within a particular school of contemporary existentialism. From this perspective he approaches the theological task, and attempts to translate the "myth" of the New Testament into thought forms comprehensible and acceptable to modern man through the concepts of a particular school of existential

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1 Rudolf Bultmann, "The New Testament and Mythology," Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate, ed. by Hans Werner Bartsch, trans. by Reginald H. Fuller (London: S.P.C.K., 1953), I, 10-44. Actually it was demythologizing as a program which was new in 1940. The seminal thoughts were already clearly present in earlier works.

2 As the well chosen title of John Macquarrie's first book on Bultmann, An Existentialist Theology (London: S.C.M. Press, 1955) clearly indicates. See pp. 25, 26.

philosophy. Before considering the question of the meaning of life in Bultmann's thought, it will be helpful to examine with some care both what he means by "demythologizing" and the general structure of his existentialist orientation.

Bultmann is not so concerned with defining the limits of the term "myth" (where myth ends and historic fact begins), as with the nature of myth itself. For, as he understands it, myth is not a mere attempt to present as historically true events which have in fact been enhanced by imagination. Nor is "myth" mere idle fancy mistakenly accepted as objective fact. "The real purpose of myth is not to present an objective picture of the world as it is, but to express man's understanding of himself in the world in which he lives."[1] It expresses man's acknowledgement that he "is not master of the world and of his life" but that these are "full of riddles and mysteries" which "have their ground and their limits in a power which is beyond all that [he] can calculate or control."[2]

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1 Bultmann, Kerygma and Myth, I, 10. Underlining mine.

2 Rudolf Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology trans. by Louise P. Smith and Erminie H. Lantero (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 19.

Myth, therefore, is an attempt to speak of the unspeakable by giving "worldly objectivity to that which is unworldly."[1] It speaks of "the power or the powers which man supposes he experiences as the ground and limit of his world and of his own activity and suffering," and "describes these powers in terms derived from the visible world... and from human life...."[2] But such objective language always has for its goal that which is "beyond the realm of known and tangible reality."[3] As such, it expresses "man's awareness that he is not Lord of his own being," and the deep seated "conviction that the origin and purpose of the world in which he lives are to be sought not within it but beyond it."[4] But the final religious significance of myth emerges from the fact that it expresses man's belief that he can be delivered from the threatening forces and united with the constructive forces which surround his existence.[5]

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1 Ibid.
2 Bultmann, Kerygma and Myth, I, 10.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., p. 11.
5 Ibid.

As Bultmann sees the problem, the particular myth forms of the New Testament have rendered the Kerygma "incredible to modern man."[1] For, living under the disciplined thinking of a scientific age, modern man is simply "convinced that the mythical view of the world is obsolete." What is more, it is both senseless and impossible to revive such a mythical view. "For all our thinking today is shaped for good or ill by modern science."[2] This being so, it is ridiculous to ask "our converts to accept not only the Gospel message, but also the mythical view of the world in which it is set."[3] The critical question for theology today is "to what extent will...faith outgrow mythical imagination?"[4] The question is a critical one, Bultmann believes, because since myth enshrines a particular understanding of man's existence in the world "the real question is whether this understanding of existence is true."[5] Faith which finds

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1 Ibid., p. 3.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Rudolf Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, trans. by Kendrick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), I, 92.
5 Bultmann, Kerygma and Myth, I, 11. Underlining mine.

the Biblical myth forms incredible "ought not to be tied down to the imagery of the New Testament mythology."[1]

To "demythologize" is not just to reduce the number of things to be believed to some essential minimum but to present the New Testament understanding of existence in non-mythological language which can be understood by man today. Theology does not say to modern man "that the number of things to be believed is smaller than he had thought, but...shows him that to believe at all is qualitatively different from accepting a certain number of propositions."[2] To be a man of faith is to accept for ones self the understanding of existence implied in but not necessarily tied to the New Testament mythology.

When Bultmann speaks of Man's "understanding" of himself or of his existence he does not, of course, have in mind the scientific comprehension of man as a biological organism. Rather, Bultmann means by "understanding" the conscious or

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1 Ibid. "The theological thoughts of the New Testament.../present/ not the object of faith but faith itself in its own self interpretation." Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, II, 239.

2 Bultmann, Kerygma and Myth, II, 183.

subconscious presuppositions that a man holds about himself and his relationship to himself, to his fellow man, to his world, and to God. He illustrates his point by reference to a child. The child understands himself to be a child and understands what this means with reference to his parents, other adults, other children. "His self understanding expresses itself in his love, trust, feeling of security, thankfulness, etc."[1] Bultmann's point is that every man has some comparable type understanding of himself, and the concern of the Christian faith is with the content of that understanding.

The understanding of human existence implied in New Testament faith confronts modern man with a genuinely repeatable possibility for his own existence and calls upon him to decide in its light how he is going to understand himself.[2] The New Testament should not be understood as "theoretical teachings /or/ timeless general truths, but only as the expression of an understanding of human existence which for the man of to-day also is a possibility for his understanding of himself."[3]

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1 Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology, p. 75. Also Kerygma and Myth, I, 203.
2 Ibid., p. 53.
3 Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, II, 251.

Thereby is opened to man the possibility of a new self-understanding, in certain ways comparable to that which is opened through love and marriage.

> What takes place is not an isolated psychological act....My whole situation is transformed..., the whole world takes on a new character. I see it, as we say, in a new light, and so it really is a new world. I achieve a new insight into my past and my future. I recognize new demands and am open to encounters in a new manner.[1]

Thus, the understanding of human existence which expresses itself in the myth forms of the New Testament must be freed from those myth forms in the interest of modern man being able to comprehend the genuine challenge of the New Testament - the call to a new self-understanding.

But what is the alternative to mythological language? Bultmann answers that the alternative is the conceptual language of "existential analysis" or "philosophical analysis," by which he has particular reference to the work of the philosopher Martin Heidegger.[2] Bultmann accepts Heidegger's claim[3]

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1 Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology, p. 75.

2 Bultmann also often indicates his indebtedness to Wilhelm Dilthey. For example in Kerygma and Myth, I, 23, 24 and Existence and Faith: Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann, trans. by Schubert M. Ogden (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1961), p. 96.

3 Heidegger understands his work to be important for theology. Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: S.C.M. Press, 1962), pp. 10, 224.

that his work is not speculative, but is rather a conceptual description of the ontological structure of human existence. "The 'right' philosophy is simply one which has worked out an appropriate terminology for the understanding of existence" which is given in and with human existence itself.[1] Heidegger has simply succeeded in conceptualizing and systematizing "the understanding of existence involved in existence itself."[2] Of course, such "philosophical analysis" is purely formal. It does not address itself to the question of the truth of the Christian faith but is concerned with describing the formal structures of human existence which make Christian faith, and therefore a Christian self-understanding, possible. If theology "wants to be a science and not merely a sermon," if it is really to "clarify existence in faith in a conceptual way"[3] (and not just echo the language of a former generation) it must take seriously and, indeed, be willing to be helped by "Heidegger's existential analysis of the ontological structure of being," which, in conceptual terms comprehensible to modern

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1 Bultmann, Kerygma and Myth, I, 193, 194.
2 Ibid., p. 194.
3 Bultmann, Existence and Faith, p. 97.

man, "would seem to be no more than a secularised, philosophical version of the New Testament view of human life."[1]

Heidegger pursues his analysis of human existence by use of the "phenomenological method of investigation."[2] His intent is to avoid speculation or elaborate reasoning about the nature of man, in the interest of a fundamental description of the conspicuously human phenomenon.

> The test of a phenomenological description is that the picture given by it is convincing, that it can be seen by anyone who is willing to look in the same direction, that the description illuminates other related ideas, and that it makes the reality which these ideas are supposed to reflect understandable.[3]

The "working knowledge" of the structure of human existence which is given in and with the existence of every man[4] reaches conceptual clarity through

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1 Bultmann, Kerygma and Myth, I, 24.

2 Heidegger, Being and Time, pp. 49 f. He is indebted to Edmund Husserl. See the article "Phenomenology" by Husserl in The Age of Analysis: 20th Century Philosophers, ed. by Morton White (N.Y: New American Library, 1955), pp. 100-115, which is a selection from his book Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology, trans. by W.R. Boyce Gibson, (N.Y: Macmillan Co. 1931). See also his article "Phenomenology" in the Encyclopedia Britannica.

3 Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), I, 106.

4 Ibid., p. 62. "disclosedness," German Erschlossenheit, Heidegger, Being and Time, p. 171.

the phenomenological method used in existential analysis.

Bultmann believes that theological objections to the possibility of a "purely formal" analysis of human existence are nothing other than "sheer prejudice."[1] Those theologians who accuse him of forcing Heidegger's categories upon the New Testament[2] are "blinding their eyes to the real problem, which is that [Heidegger is] saying the same thing as the New Testament and saying it quite independently."[3] There is nothing fundamentally mysterious about the New Testament understanding of man. "All the basic Christian concepts have a content that can be

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1 Bultmann, Kerygma and Myth, I, 195.

2 For example, Wingren rightly observes that "Bultmann shares the naivete which characterizes a theologian who has accepted a certain concrete philosophy. A certain philosopher is quoted, and then it is asserted that philosophy has explained, proved, shown, etc." Gustaf Wingren, Theology in Conflict: Nygren-Barth-Bultmann, trans. by Eric H. Wahlstrom (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), p. 49. But Bultmann is not formally dogmatic about the correctness of Heidegger's work and acknowledges that "any resultant analysis is still open to correction, and here as elsewhere discussion is the sine qua non of progress." Kerygma and Myth, I, 195.

3 Bultmann, Kerygma and Myth, I, 25. Bultmann is aware, of course, that Heidegger stands within and benefits from the general Christian tradition of western culture. Ibid., p. 26.

determined ontologically prior to faith and in a purely rational way."[1] Convinced that this is so, Bultmann conceives the task of demythologizing as the translation of the understanding of human existence implied in New Testament mythology into language comprehensible to modern man through the concepts of existential analysis.

Attention has already been called to the fact that "existential analysis" attempts to investigate and conceptualize the ontological structures of human existence. Recognizing the significance of this "analysis" for theology, Bultmann seeks to clarify "the peculiarity of human existence..., the formal structures of this existence" as it is understood in the New Testament.[2] His conclusions on this matter are generally summarized in the following points:

1. Man is soma(body). This is the "most comprehensive term which Paul uses to characterize man's

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1 Bultmann, Existence and Faith, p. 96. Bultmann does not believe that the actual possibility of achieving "authentic existence" or salvation is made possible through its mere clarification by existential analysis; it is only made possible by an act of God and the obedience of faith. Kerygma and Myth, I, 25 f. See also pp.117 f. this paper.

2 Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, I, 192.

existence."[1] It is clear that soma does not refer to a bio-chemical organism, but to that which is characteristically man, that without which man would not be man. Soma refers to the very structure of self-hood. "Man does not have a soma; he is soma, for in not a few cases soma can be translated simply 'I' (or whatever personal pronoun fits the context)."[2]

2. "Man is called soma in respect to his being able to make himself the object of his own actions or to experience himself as the subject to whom something happens."[3] He, in fact, has "a relationship to himself," and is therefore "able in a certain sense to distinguish himself from himself."[4]

3. "Since it belongs to man's nature to have a relationship to himself, a double possibility exists: to be at one with himself or at odds (estranged from himself). The possibility of having one's self in hand or of losing this control and being at the mercy of a power not one's own is inherent to human existence."[5] The relationship a man has

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1 Ibid.
2 Ibid., p. 194.
3 Ibid., p. 195.
4 Ibid., p. 196.
5 Ibid.

to himself "can be either an appropriate or a perverted one."[1]

4. This somatic existence of man is characterized by "the state of living toward some goal."[2] Man "lives in his intentionality"[3] and consequently "he factually lives only by constantly moving on, as it were,...by projecting himself into a possibility that lies before him."[4] Such intentionality does not have the character of "instinctive striving." Rather, it is an "understanding act of the will... an 'evaluating act'.../which/ moves in the sphere of decisions."[5] The goal itself "is left still undetermined in the mere ontological structure of having some orientation or other; but this structure offers the possibility of choosing one's goal."[6]

5. There is a critical relationship between the fact that man's existence moves in the realm of intention and decision and the fact that he may gain or lose

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1 Ibid., p. 197. See also Heidegger, Being and Time, pp. 67, 68f.

2 Ibid., p. 209.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., p. 210. Man is to be understood as "potentiality-for-Being." (Heidegger, Being and Time, pp. 183, 131.) "This is the formal meaning of Dasein's existential constitution." (Heidegger, Being and Time, p. 69; Bultmann, Existence and Faith, p. 107.)

5 Ibid., p. 213. See also Rudolf Bultmann, Jesus and the Word, pp. 42, 44, 45.

6 Ibid., p. 209.

himself. For his decisions may result in his coming under the control of enemy powers which "estrange" him from himself, or, again, of friendly powers which "give him back to himself" and thus bring him "to life."[1]

The ontological structure of human existence opens for man the possibility of evil or good, of deciding against God or for him. But the ontological structure of his existence remains the same whatever the direction of his decision, and whatever his resultant entic condition. For this structure is that which make man man.

Bultmann believes that "it belongs to the nature of man (i.e. to his ontological structure) to desire 'what is Good,'" to be at one with himself, to experience the wholeness which is life instead of the estrangement which is death.[2] This united existence, which is his true or authentic existence, is "the existence that at heart he wants,"[3] and his "life is pervaded by the quest."[4]

Having, so far, considered the ontological structure of human life as it is presupposed in the New

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1 Ibid., p. 198.
2 Ibid., p. 212.
3 Ibid., p. 227.
4 Ibid., II, 26.

Testament, Bultmann turns to a consideration of the ontic (factual) realities of man's existence. For it is necessary to acknowledge the Pauline presupposition that "man has always already missed the existence that at heart he seeks."[1] In the ontological necessity of making some decision or other, man has lost his "authentic manhood," even though he may not realize or acknowledge it.[2]

Man moves between two ontic possibilities, between God and the world, between truth and falsehood, between the reality of his situation and the unreality which, in his anxiety about his finitude, he vainly creates for himself. "Man stands between God and the creation and must decide between the two."[3] Life comes to him who chooses simple openness to God, and the existence which, moment by moment, he gives. Death (estranged and inauthentic existence) comes to him who anxiously grasps after security within the world. For, the

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1 Ibid., I, 127.

2 Bultmann, Kerygma and Myth, I, 29. Man is "constantly waiving the possibilities of /his/ Being, or else /he/ seizes upon them and makes mistakes." Heidegger, Being and Time, p. 183.

3 Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, I, 229.

world is "characterized by creaturely transitoriness," and it "becomes a destructive power whenever man decides in favor of it instead of for God[1]...; i.e. when he bases his life upon it rather than upon God."[2] Man's situation is such that when he fails to trust in God and the future which God gives, his only alternative is a "specious reality..., the Nothing which professes to be something, and which cheats of his life him who takes it for truth."[3]

The man whose understanding of himself is such that he seeks to secure his own anxious, finite existence always inevitably betrays himself. He who, driven by his anxiety, puts his "confidence in the flesh"[4] (i.e. supposes he can find security in a world which by its nature is not secure at all), "in reality makes himself dependent upon that which he supposes he can control."[5] In seeking to find his life he, in fact, loses it. For, by deciding

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1 Romans 1: 25.
2 Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, I, 230.
3 Ibid., II, 19, 20.
4 Bultmann notes that Paul also uses σαρξ to refer to the "moral and religious efforts of a man" insofar as they are attempts to win security for himself. Ibid., I, 239f.
5 Ibid., pp. 243, 244.

in favor of sarx (the flesh) or the kosmos (the world) man is choosing "the sphere which marks out the horizon or the possibilities of what he does and experiences," with the result that his own existence is "determined by the sphere within which he moves."[1] Instead of finding the creation at his disposal, he finds that it disposes of him.[2] It "gains the upper hand over" him, and "comes to constitute an independent super-self over all individual selves."[3] This "seizes from the self the power of control over itself" with the result that "man no longer has himself in hand."[4] He has lost to the creation the "capacity to be the subject of his own actions."[5] Man is at odds with himself, and his life is marked by an inner estrangement of himself from himself.[6]

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1 Ibid., p. 235.
2 Ibid., p. 236. See also Heidegger, Being and Time, p. 107.
3 Ibid., pp. 256, 257.
4 Ibid., p. 197.
5 Ibid., p. 245.
6 Bultmann notes that "the temptation exists to /interpret/ the perceived separation.../as/ a divorce....That is the understanding of the self that is found in (Gnostic) dualism." Ibid., p. 199.

Corresponding antithetically to this situation is that in which man gratefully receives his life from God. This alternative is described in the New Testament as a living "according to the Spirit," "according to the Lord," or "according to love."[1] This possibility for man arises from a new understanding of himself in which his anxiety is accepted, his search for security abandoned, and, "recognizing himself to be the property of God," his will is oriented in a new direction,[2] and he "lives for Him."[3] This new understanding expresses itself as "the service of the 'living God' [which]...is also a 'serving of one another.'"[4] It is characterized by freedom from the worldly powers which had wrestled him from himself, and therefore amounts to his "redemption" in that he "gains life and thereby his own self."[5]

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1 Ibid., p. 237.
2 Ibid., p. 207.
3 Ibid., p. 330. See also Rudolf Bultmann, Essays: Philosophical and Theological, trans. by James C.G. Grieg (London: S.C.M. Press, 1955), p. 8.
4 Ibid., pp. 331, 332.
5 Ibid., I, 351; II, 17. Bultmann notes that "soma pneumatikon ("spiritual body") rightly interpreted,...does not in the end mean a body formed of an ethereal substance, but it does mean that the self is determined by the power of God which reconciles the cleft between self and self within a man." Ibid., I, 199.

II

The teleological dimension of the question of the meaning of life - the general question concerning God's purpose for the whole of mankind - meets a certain hostility arising from the very structure of Bultmann's thought. This is not to imply that Bultmann is not sensitive to the importance of the question. Indeed, he knows that "man's life is pervaded by the quest for reality."[1] And, John Macquarrie, one of Bultmann's best and most sympathetic interpreters, writes that Bultmann approaches the theological task "out of the human situation, from the question of the meaning and end of existence that is agitating a dread-filled mankind."[2] The crux of Bultmann's discontent with this particular dimension of the question arises from its general character. He is simply convinced that the problem is an intimately personal one, and "it is...impossible to speak of personal existence

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1 Ibid., II, 26.

2 John Macquarrie, An Existentialist Theology (London: S.C.M. Press, 1955), p. 136.

in terms of general statements."[1] And again, "the statements of belief are not general statements."[2]

Bultmann's antagonism to general statements, particularly those which have the character of a Weltanschauung (world view), arises from his existentialist informed conviction that man's "existence" as a historical creature precludes the possibility of his standing outside history and creation so as to view them with the kind of perspective which would permit a general picture of the world which corresponds to reality. Man has only the limited perspective given him in and with his particular historical existence. He is not above history but in it, and in it at a particular time and place. Therefore, every attempt to force a finite perspective - a finite principle of interpretation - upon the cosmic whole can only lead to a distortion and falsehood.[3]

Furthermore, every generalization about the meaning of the world amounts to an attempted "escape

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1 Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology, p. 66.
2 Ibid., p. 83.
3 Rudolf Bultmann, History and Eschatology (Edinburgh: The University Press, 1957), p. 138. Actually, this theme can be found on almost any page of the book.

from the enigma and from the decisive question of the 'moment.'"[1]

> A Weltanschauung is a theory about the world and life, and about the unity of the world, its origin, purpose or worth - or again, its worthlessness - about the meaning of it all - or again, about its meaninglessness....It is a question of understanding my life and my destinies on the basis of a general conception of the world - always as an instance of a general rule. /As such it is an/ escape from the reality of my existence, which is actually real only in the "moment," in the question involved in the "moment" and in the decision called for by the "moment"....It is the effort to find security in generalizations, whereas insecurity is what characterizes the real nature of human existence. A Weltanschauung is an attempt to relieve man of a decision when consciousness of his insecurity breaks in on him out of the situation of the "moment"....It/ stands in sharpest contrast to /genuine/ belief in God.[2]

Therefore, the question of the meaning of life can not and must not be answered by reference to a supposed meaning of history considered as a whole. For, the question of the meaning of history is for man an impossible and therefore "meaningless"

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1 Bultmann, Essays, p. 8.

2 Ibid. Similarly, in his study of Jesus, Bultmann concludes that "He has no so called individual or social ethics; the concept of an ideal or end is foreign to him.../He/ has no system of values.... Jesus teaches no ethics at all....Jesus sees man and his life...as absolutely insecure before what confronts him. A man...cannot in the moment of decision fall back upon principles....Every moment of decision is essentially new. For man...stands...alone in empty space /confronted by the will of God/." Bultmann, Jesus and the Word, trans. by Louise P. Smith and Erminie H. Lantero (London: Fontana Books, 1934), pp. 65, 66.

question.[1] The only valid question is the individual question, the question of the meaning of my particular life here and now. But just this question can only be answered by me - for only I stand where I am. And, it is just where I am that life is full of meaningful possibilities. For through me the past offers to the present concrete problems which demand responsible solution or development for the future.[2] The meaning of each individual's life consists in this opportunity for responsible decisions in the present. This question, therefore, is always a valid question, whereas the general question is not.

Bultmann's dissatisfaction with any Weltanschauung also arises from his understanding of the relation of

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1 Bultmann, History and Eschatology, p. 120. See also his essay "Das Verständnis Der Geschichte Im Griechentum Und Im Christentum," Der Sinn Der Geschichte, Herausgegeben von Leonhard Reinisch, (München, Verlag C.H. Beck, 1961), pp. 64, 65, where Bultmann writes that "Die Frage nach dem Sinn der Geschichte kann nicht beantwortet werden als die Frage nach dem Sinn der Gesamtgeschichte." In an essay written in 1940 Bultmann seemed to acknowledge the existence in the New Testament of a belief in a general cosmic purpose of God, but found no attempt by the Biblical authors to know or verify its content. See Essays, pp. 76, 77. This formal belief, however, plays no detectable role in Bultmann's other major discussions of the issue. In History and Eschatology, p. 144, he writes that "the historical process falls to the responsibility of men, to the decisions of the individual person. In this responsibility...the unity of history is grounded."

2 Bultmann, Der Sinn Der Geschichte, p. 65. Also, History and Eschatology, pp. 135, 155.

theology to philosophy. The philosopher, using the phenomenological method, has the task, not of evolving a general theory about which he makes deductions, but the more specific and helpful task of bringing the phenomenon of man to self-manifestation. Insofar as philosophy does pursue this - its rightful task - theology must gratefully allow "itself to be referred by philosophy to the phenomenon itself."[1] For it is only through such philosophical analysis that theology can "clarify existence in faith in a conceptual way."[2] But, with this phenomenological analysis the task of philosophy rightly ends. It should not attempt "to offer an ideal pattern of human existence."[3] Philosophy rightly speaks of the formal ontological structures of human existence in general. Theology speaks to the particular man and considers with him the question of the meaning of his existence. "A philosophy would be unusable if it undertook to ascertain

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1 Bultmann, Existence and Faith, p. 95.
2 Ibid., p. 97.
3 Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology, p. 55. Heidegger argues that theory seeks universal and uniform truth, but man's moods betray the wavering and insecure quality of his life which always escapes summary. Being and Time, p. 177.

the 'meaning' of human existence....It would then try to take from the concrete man the question as to his 'meaning,' a question that is posed uniquely to him and can only be answered by him as an individual person."[1] In such a case "philosophy would be just as absurd as its considering whether in a concrete case a proposal of marriage is to be accepted or rejected."[2] To put the matter epigrammatically, philosophy speaks of what it means to exist, but theology speaks to the individual concerning the meaning of his existence.[3]

Nevertheless, this does not mean that theology, any more than philosophy, may indulge in the luxury of a Weltanschauung. The individual "has need of theology for his own realization,"[4] but this does not mean that theology may relieve the individual of his personal responsibility by suggesting a general answer to him. Instead, theology undertakes to clarify for the individual a possibility for his own existence which is opened to him by the New Testament[5] and allows him to become personally

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1 Bultmann, Existence and Faith, p. 95.
2 Ibid., p. 93.
3 See Kerygma and Myth, I, 108.
4 Bultmann, Existence and Faith, p. 94.
5 Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, II, 251.

responsible for deciding whether the meaning of his life is enshrined in this possibility.[1] For, the question of the meaning of life can only be answered by the individual as confronted with the various possibilities for his existence he responsibly decides what will be the meaning of his life.

While recognising, therefore, Bultmann's desire to avoid any suggestion of a Weltanschauung, and any general answer to the question of the meaning of life, it is nevertheless true that, for him, the question of meaning is intimately associated with the question of "authentic existence," about which he has a great deal to say. The problem of authentic existence can be discussed most adequately in terms of the vocational dimension of the question of the meaning of life.

III

The vocational dimension of the question of the meaning of life - the personal, individual form of

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1 Of course, the theologian, as a man of faith, trusts that it is "in the knowledge of /God/ that every being acquires its meaning." Bultmann, Essays, p. 6. But he knows that "this faith is not a knowledge possessed once for all; it is not a general world-view... It can be a living faith only when the believer is always asking what God is telling him here and now." Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology, p. 64.

the question, which asks: "What is the meaning of my particular life? How do I come to realize a personal sense of meaningfulness?"- is given extensive consideration in Bultmann's theology. Briefly, his position is that the question of the meaning of life receives an existential answer (as opposed to a general and therefore irrelevant and misleading answer) in the life of the individual who experiences authentic existence. But, this conclusion is to be understood as constituting a purely formal answer. It does not suggest teleological content (which is always intimately personal), but describes the structure of a particular way of existing in which the individual experiences personal worth and meaning.

Further consideration must now be given to the idea of "authentic existence" in Bultmann's thought:[1]

1. When man's existence is described as "authentic (eigentlich), reference is thereby made to his "being rightwised"[2] so that he is at one with himself, and is free to be himself.[3] In traditional

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1 First by recognising that the term is primarily Heidegger's. See Being and Time, p. 312 f. Also, pp. 95 f. this paper.

2 Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, I, 270.

3 Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology, pp. 29, 40. It is "authentic-Being-one's-Self." Heidegger, Being and Time, p. 168.

New Testament vocabulary it amounts to "salvation." 2. "Authentic existence" demands "the abandonment of all self-contrived security,...the hankering after tangible realities and the clinging to transitory objects....Everything in the world has become indifferent and unimportant....Outwardly everything remains as before, but inwardly [a man's] relation to the world has been radically changed. The world has no further claim on him."[1] Indeed, this world is to be understood as "ultimately empty and unreal,"[2] and even as "a profane place."[3] As a determinative fact in the life of the Christian, the world "no longer exists."[4] Bultmann is able to conclude that "the chief aim of every genuine religion is escape from the world," and he suggests, in the name of Luther, a kind of Christian nihilism.[5]

Bultmann's intention is not to recommend asceticism, but a freedom from infatuation with the world which will permit a "simple readiness for God's

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1 Bultmann, Kerygma and Myth, I, 19, 20. Also Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology, p. 40.
2 Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology, p. 23.
3 Ibid., p. 84.
4 Bultmann, Kerygma and Myth, I, 113.
5 Bultmann, Essays, p. 301.

demand."[1] Authentic existence demands this "freedom from all human conventions and norms of value."[2] This does not mean, for Bultmann, a "dualistic world view," but "desecularization in the sense of a smashing of all human standards and evaluations."[3] It is precisely within the world that a man must be detached from the world, from its control over him.[4] 3. "The ontological possibility of [authentic existence] is simultaneously the ontic possibility of having a relationship to God."[5] This means that genuine life must be based on the intangible, grounded in the beyond.[6] It is a "willingness to live by the strength of the invisible and uncontrollable."[7] This "desecularization" and Godward orientation of an individual's life amounts to "transition into

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1 Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, I, 11.
2 Ibid., p. 343.
3 Ibid., II, 65.
4 Ibid., pp. 85, 86.
5 Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, I, 223. Heidegger's equivalent to this emergence of authentic existence in confrontation with God is his well known "Being-toward-death," in which authentic existence is said to emerge as a man confronts and accepts with resolve the fact of his own death, the fact of his existence as a "Being-toward-death." Being and Time, pp. 310, 311, 353 f. Also Bultmann, Existence and Faith, pp. 108 f.
6 Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology, pp. 40, 41; Jesus and the Word, p. 35.
7 Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, II, 75.

eschatological existence."[1] So then, a man's true life emerges with the recognition that his existence is both from God and for God,[2] and that it is in the personal knowledge of him that a human life "acquires its meaning."[3]

4. The highest meaning of an individual's life is constituted in his being permitted to be for God, and therefore also for his fellow man. "Authentic existence" includes the self-understanding which is aware that God has placed every individual man in relation to his fellow man, and that every individual "is himself from others and for others."[4] For it is in just "such an attitude" that "man is himself."[5] But, existence for the neighbor is never to be taken as a generality. Authentic

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1 Ibid., II, 78; I, 330.
2 Bultmann, Existence and Faith, p. 216.
3 Bultmann, Essays, p. 6. Bultmann does not mean to imply a "mystical relationship." (Ibid., p. 10; Theology of the New Testament, II, 84) "Only in faith is this existence a reality - not in any direct relationship to Jesus or to God." (Theology of the New Testament, II, 85) It does not descend "between" worldly events, but occurs "within them." (Jesus Christ and Mythology, p. 61.) However, it is just this "relationship to God /that/ determines man's relationship to himself." (Theology of the New Testament, I, 324.)
4 Bultmann, Existence and Faith, p. 216.
5 Ibid., p. 222.

existence and personal meaning are discovered only as the individual lives responsibly for "his fellow men," who are always to be understood as "his concrete, historically determined neighbors."[1] "It is in relation to them that he is responsible, not to some universal law or idea."[2]

5. "Authentic existence" arises as a response to an imperative.[3] Indeed, "fulfilment of God's will is the condition for participation in" a meaningful life.[4] For this, a man may not look to some universal law or principle to relieve him of concrete responsibility for his decisions.[5] Rather, God's "requirements are intrinsically intelligible"[6] in that each particular "moment of decision contains all that is necessary for the decision,"[7] and

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1 Ibid.
2 Ibid., p. 214.
3 Bultmann, Kerygma and Myth, I, 21.
4 Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, I, 20.
5 Bultmann, Existence and Faith, p. 214.
6 Bultmann, Jesus and the Word, p. 61. Blind obedience is not radical enough. "Only...when a man understands the demand and affirms it from within himself" is the obedience truly genuine. Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, I, 12.
7 Bultmann, Jesus and the Word, p. 67. Consequently, "the indifference of everything worldly disappears in the concrete situation of personal responsibility." Theology of the New Testament, I, 342.

therefore "man knows what is now good and evil,... not on the basis of any past experience or rational deductions, but directly from the immediate situation,"[1] "in the encounter with his neighbor."[2]

6. Authentic existence calls for both individuality and community. It does this, however, by first demanding individuality. Man must be freed from the tyranny of collectivity which in John's Gospel is called "the world."[3] For "man can only receive his self in radical isolation in the presence of God."[4] And just such an individual self is the necessary prerequisite to any genuine community.[5] Authentic existence, however, calls forth "authentic-being-

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1 Bultmann, Jesus and the Word, p. 68.

2 Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, I, 24. Bultmann notes that Jesus' "command of love explains nothing concerning the content of love....If a man really loves he knows already what he has to do." Jesus and the Word, p. 72. See also Theology of the New Testament, II, 62, 67.

3 Ibid., II, 28-32. Heidegger speaks of "the real dictatorship of the 'they,'" by which he means the public conceived as a personless neuter, das Man. (Being and Time, p. 164.) Before the public "every supremacy is silently suppressed, every original thought is glossed over as well known, every triumph is vulgarised, every mystery loses its power." (See Being and Time, p. 165. I have here preferred Macquarrie's other and earlier translation in An Existentialist Theology, p. 91.

4 Bultmann, Essays, p. 302.

5 Ibid., pp. 300-304.

with-one-another,"[1] and so implies community. Now, "true community can only exist between men who are individuals, who are themselves."[2] Only the individual who has risen above mere collectivity is able to accept and bestow true community.[3] For true community is always "community in the transcendent."[4] It is just such a community of the transcendent that "fulfils what is planned and intended in all human community."[5]

7. Because man's existence is an existence in "intentionality,"[6] his life is at stake in his every decision. For, "with every choice he decides and limits his own possibility."[7] "Authentic existence" is never, therefore, a once-for-all possession, never a "decisionless capacity...to do the good only,"[8] but must ever and again be "appropriated by deliberate

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1 Mitdasein. Heidegger, Being and Time, p. 159.
2 Bultmann, Essays, p. 300.
3 Ibid., p. 303.
4 Ibid., p. 301.
5 Bultmann, Essays, p. 303. For a criticism of his failure to develop an adequate concept of community see Macquarrie, An Existentialist Theology pp. 90, 95, 211, 213, 215.
6 See p. 97 this paper.
7 Bultmann, Jesus and the Word, p. 67.
8 Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, I, 332.

resolve."[1] Human life is such that "man only exists by constantly laying hold of his possibilities,"[2] by standing out (ex-isting) from his receding past toward his ever emerging future.

The matter may be summarized as follows: Authentic existence is the state, subject to continuous renewal, in which a man is at one with himself as a result of having abandoned all attempts to find security in an insecure world (a world which can only rob him of his wholeness and put him at odds with himself), and having grounded his life in God by responding to the specific imperative, the call to a meaningful life, given in concrete encounter with his neighbor (not as a universal law or principle), and which thus creates authentic individuals in authentic community.

But how does this experience of a meaningful life which is enshrined in "authentic existence" become an actual possibility for a man? Bultmann's answer is

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1 Bultmann, Kerygma and Myth, I, 22. Underlining mine.

2 Bultmann, Existence and Faith, p. 96. Bultmann notes that the idea of reward for righteousness which is sometimes present in Jesus' thought (Mat. 6:19, Mk. 10:21) is, in fact, a "primitive expression for the idea that in what a man does his own real being is at stake - that self which he not already is, but is to become." New Testament Theology, I, 15.

twofold. Seen from one side the answer is "the Word of God"; seen from the other side the answer is "faith." For, the "Word" comes to man as the bearer of meaning, and man's "faith' is his decision to lay hold of the possibility which the word opens for him.

When Bultmann uses the term Word of God, he is thinking of the actual, concrete, historical possibility which is opened to a man by the love, cross and resurrection of Christ for a new understanding of himself and his world. This Word is not to be understood in terms of general ideas or timeless truths.[1] But, neither is it to be thought of as a mystery to our understanding. For, "I cannot truly believe in the Word without understanding it."[2] Far from being an abstraction, the "living Word" is an event which "rises up in history" like breakers in the ocean.[3] As such, it "acts on me, speaks to me, here and now."[4] It does not disrupt or occur between worldly events, but moves as an event "within

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1 Bultmann, Kerygma and Myth, I, 207.
2 Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology, p. 43.
3 Ibid., p. 79.
4 Ibid., p. 64.

them."[1] It does not have the quality of the miraculous or supernatural about it, but that of "an historical event wrought out in time and space."[2] As such, it is both "sober" and "factual."[3]

The Word of God does not contain material to be approved by reason or, alternatively, assented to by a sacrificium intellectus. Rather, the Word moves in the realm of personal address, of demand and promise, and speaks "not to the theoretical

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1 Ibid., p. 61. Bultmann insists on the one hand that "a man learns what God wants of him immediately out of his own situation in the encounter with his neighbor." (Theology of the New Testament, I, 24); and on the other hand that "the salvation-occurence is nowhere present except in the proclaiming, accosting, demanding, and promising word of preaching." (Theology of the New Testament, I, 302.) The apparent contradiction can be explained by his further conviction that "while it may be said that God meets us always and everywhere, we do not see and hear Him always and everywhere, unless His Word supervenes and enables us to understand the moment here and now." (Jesus Christ and Mythology, pp. 78, 79.) This is possible because "this Word need not necessarily be uttered /as the proclamation of the church/ at the same moment of time in which it becomes a decisive word for me. It is possible for something I heard yesterday or even thirty years ago to become a decisive word for me now." Furthermore, the proclaiming church is an event within the world. (Kerygma and Myth, I, 207.) Actually, Bultmann's use of the term "Word of God" has two references: (1) the formal structure calling for sacrifice of security and the decision to live solely by God's grace, and (2) the material content of the call to live this way given in the existential situation.

2 Bultmann, Kerygma and Myth, I, 43.

3 Ibid., I, 44.

reason, but to the hearer as a self."[1] The decisive fact about the Word is never its conceptual form,[2] but its character as "encounter" and "personal address." Indeed, "the meaning of Jesus' resurrection is not that he is translated into the beyond, but [that]...the risen Christ himself encounters the hearer" in the Word.[3] When events and encounters make demands upon us, this is the living Word.

The existential significance of the Word appears with the possibility it presents of a new self-understanding, a new existence, a new life. The Word encounters man "with the question of how [he is] to interpret [his] own existence."[4] By it man is cast "into decision in his bare, undifferentiated

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1 Ibid., p. 36. Bultmann argues that language about God's speech and address is not mythological but analogical, and is therefore justified within his own demythologizing program. (Ibid., pp. 63 f; Kerygma and Myth, I, 196 f.) But, for this and other important reasons, "the emerging consensus" is that "Bultmann's proposal is intrinsically problematic." Schubert M. Ogden, Christ Without Myth (London: Collins, 1962), p. 112.

2 Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, II, 63, 240.

3 Ibid., I, 306, 305; II, 57, 90. Kerygma and Myth, I, 41, 42.

4 Bultmann, Jesus and the Word, p. 16.

situation of being human."[1] Through the Word "the believer finds himself searched and known by God and...his own existence is exposed by the encounter."[2] He is, in that moment, torn from his false security[3] and asked "whether this existence-from-Nothing is existence at all."[4] He is asked whether or not he wills to remain in this inauthentic, meaningless condition, or if he is willing to "surrender his own understanding of himself, letting himself be crucified with Christ, in order to experience the 'power of his resurrection.'"[5] Through the Word authentic existence and a meaningful life become a concrete possibility.[6]

Faith is the act in which a man grasps this

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1 Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, II, 63. In Heidegger it is conscience rather than the Word which calls man to his true being. "In conscience Dasein calls itself." "Das Dasein ruft im Gewissen sich selbst." In conscience inauthentic existence is called to itself. (Being and Time, p. 320.) This is necessary because "in order to find itself at all,.../inauthentic existence/ must be 'shown' to itself in its possible authenticity." (Being and Time, p. 313.) For Bultmann's appreciation of conscience see Theology of the New Testament, I, 216-220.

2 Ibid., II, 42.
3 Ibid., I, 25.
4 Ibid., II, 23.
5 Ibid., I, 336.
6 Ibid., p. 275.

possibility, in which he lays hold of the new understanding of himself and his world which is opened to him by the Word, in which he seizes and appropriates Christ's love, death and resurrection in such a way that they become a possibility for his own existence, and, in fact, the power that determines his life.[1] "To believe...does not mean to concern ourselves with a mythical process wrought outside of us and our world,...but rather to make the cross of Christ our own, to undergo crucifixion with him."[2] It is the decision to accept God's judgement upon our previous self-understanding, and henceforth to understand ourselves only in terms of God's grace, as "men who are crucified and risen with Christ"[3] - an understanding which must be perceived "anew every morning."[4]

There is thus opened to man the possibility of being "rightwised," of living his authentic existence, of experiencing life. For these are

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1 Ibid., p. 302.
2 Bultmann, Kerygma and Myth, I, 36.
3 Ibid., p. 42. Also Theology of the New Testament, I, 188, 301.
4 Ibid., p. 204.

precisely what becomes opened "to him who has surrendered his old understanding of himself, letting himself be crucified with Christ, in order to experience the 'power of the resurrection.'"[1] The man of faith finds that his existence is light and not darkness in that he is able "to orient himself... [and] to understand himself in his world and find his way in it."[2] The question of the meaning of his life becomes <u>for him</u> a question with an answer - an answer which moves not in the realm of the abstract and detached inquiry, but in the depths of his existence as a <u>person</u>. His encounter with the Word <u>is</u> in its concrete historical context his encounter with meaning, and his obedient response in his decision for a meaningful life. "In faith the believer has found the understanding of his own existence."[3]

IV

Bultmann's answer to the social or ethical dimension of the question of the meaning of life -

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1 Bultmann, <u>Theology of the New Testament</u>, I, 336.
2 <u>Ibid</u>., II, 17, 18, 84.
3 <u>Ibid</u>., p. 84.

What is the meaning of the individual's life for and in relation to the life of his neighbor? - is consistent with the general structure of his thought, and has already been partially described. When a man exists authentically, he exists in response to an imperative,[1] he exists *for* God, and therefore also *for* his neighbor.[2] Indeed, he can only hope to find meaning in obedience to God's will, and God's will *is* his will *for* the neighbor. The individual before the neighbor must be understood as the individual before the will of God. "There is no obedience to God in a vacuum so to speak, no obedience separate from the concrete situation in which I stand as a man among men."[3] And again, "there is no obedience to God which does not have to prove itself in the concrete situation of meeting one's neighbor."[4]

Bultmann's insistence that a man only finds personal meaning as he is personally obedient to the concrete will of God as it is encountered in the neighbor does not permit the development of a

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1 See p. 114 this paper.
2 See p. 113 this paper.
3 Bultmann, Jesus and the Word, p. 35.
4 Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, I, 18.

Weltanschauung. "When a man asks after the way of life, there is nothing in particular to say to him. He is to do what is right, what every one knows."[1] He is to love God, and his neighbor as himself. But, the content of this demand for love is left undefined in the formal giving of the command. In the concrete historical confrontation with the neighbor, God's commandment to love emerges as "intrinsically intelligible."[2] Not in the application of some previously developed abstract theory, but "directly from the immediate situation" man discovers what it means for him to love his neighbor. Confronted with his neighbor the individual knows what it is to exist for his neighbor. The actual "moment of decision contains all that is necessary for the decision."[3] He is able to know this because he has been told to love his neighbor as himself, and "what it means to love himself he knows very well, and without any theory or system."[4] Indeed, only in this way can his love be genuine - when he "takes charge" of his freedom and responsibly

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1 Bultmann, Jesus and the Word, p. 74.
2 Ibid., p. 61. See also Bultmann, Existence and Faith, p. 214.
3 Ibid., p. 67.
4 Ibid., p. 86.

decides what it means to love his neighbor in the here and now.[1]

The meaning of the individual's life for and in relation to the neighbor consists precisely in his being for him. It calls forth simple "openness for whoever confronts one at any given time."[2] This means fundamentally the renunciation by the individual of any claims of his own.[3] Man cannot claim that his action is "unambiguously regulated by natural impulse";[4] he can appeal neither to a universal principle nor a text of commands and prohibitions; he cannot appoint his neighbor to do his loving for him.[5] His life is "responsible freedom...qualified by sin,"[6] and it is within the historical context of that responsible freedom that he must be a man, and therefore a man for other men. It is only in such existence-for-others that "faith makes good its freedom from the world,"[7] and so from the meaninglessness of the Nothing.[8]

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1 Bultmann, Existence and Faith, p. 107.
2 Bultmann, Essays, p. 303.
3 Bultmann, Jesus and the Word, p. 33.
4 Bultmann, Existence and Faith, p. 224.
5 Bultmann, Jesus and the Word, pp. 64, 65.
6 Bultmann, Existence and Faith, p. 224.
7 Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, II, 32.
8 Ibid., pp. 19, 20.

V

What is the meaning of life in the perspective of death? Bultmann answers the ultimate or eschatological dimension of the primary question by first pointing to the difference which faith makes in a man's understanding of himself. The man of faith has accepted "completely different standards as to what is to be called death and what life."[1] Living "by the strength of the invisible and uncontrollable," his is " a life that to the world's point of view cannot even be proved to exist."[2] The Christian knows <u>life</u> as a "present reality" in his dependence upon God and his openness to the future as God gives the future.[3] He also knows <u>death</u>, not just as a future event, but "as the already present nothingness of a life estranged from God."[4]

Following what he recognizes as an approach to

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1 <u>Ibid</u>., p. 75.
2 <u>Ibid</u>.
3 <u>Ibid</u>., I, 348.
4 <u>Ibid</u>., II, 153.

"demythologizing" already present in the Gospel of John, Bultmann attempts to reinterpret eschatology. He notes that with John "eschatology as a time-perspective has dropped out because he has so radically transposed eschatological occurence into the present."[1] His important conclusion is that "the essential thing about the eschatological message is the idea of human existence that it contains - not the belief that the end of the world is just ahead."[2]

The opportunity for authentic existence is the opportunity for eschatological existence here and now. The Word of God comes to man bringing both judgement and grace to his present.[3] Consequently, every moment becomes the eschatological moment, the moment for decision. "Each particular Now is to the eyes of faith that one Now which is the fulness of time."[4] The man whose understanding of himself is such that, in his anxiety about the future, he attempts to secure his own existence by living out of his own and the world's resources is,

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1 Ibid., p. 79.
2 Ibid., I, 23.
3 Bultmann, Jesus and the Word, p. 96.
4 Bultmann, Kerygma and Myth, I, 114.

in fact, only "shutting himself up against the future, which is not at his disposal."[1] He actually has no future, because "he who derives life out of the transitory must perish with the perishing of the transitory."[2]

The man who understands himself in terms of God's grace is transposed into present eschatological existence because having let go his anxiety about himself and his future, and turned it over to God, he is free from the world and the threat of the present, and so is open to the future as God gives the future.[3] He possesses "genuine future"[4] who, in faith, accepts the imminent, unknown future from God, even "in the face of death and darkness."[5]

Thus, the meaning of the present is revealed as <u>the time of decision</u>. Like "the process of living, which is in motion at every instant,"[6] the Word of God places before man life and death, grace and judgement, and demands that he choose. His life is continually at stake in his decisions.[7]

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1 Bultmann, <u>Theology of the New Testament</u>, I, 320.
2 <u>Ibid</u>., p. 247.
3 <u>Ibid</u>.
4 <u>Ibid</u>., p. 332.
5 Bultmann, <u>Jesus Christ and Mythology</u>, p. 31.
6 Bultmann, <u>Jesus and the Word</u>, p. 139.
7 "That which happened in the years 1-30 has, as the act of God, no end." <u>Kerygma and Myth</u>, I, 113.

"The overcoming of the world...must be done over and over again."[1] For, authentic and meaningful life "is never to be found in the present as a fulfilled reality, but always lies ahead."[2] Both life and death are ever-present possibilities for man - possibilities which are determined by his decisions, through which he may gain his life or lose it. Eschatology, rightly interpreted, clarifies the meaning of the present, and radically alters the traditional understanding of life and death.

Bultmann, in transposing eschatology into the present, abandons all "cosmological" hopes for the salvation of the world, judging them to have their origin in "Stoic pantheism."[3] He is led to the remarkable conclusion that:

> Eschatology tells us the meaning and goal of the time process, but that answer does not consist in a philosophy of history....Indeed, eschatology is not at all concerned with the meaning and goal of secular history, for secular history belongs to the old aeon, and therefore can have neither meaning nor goal. /Eschatology/ is concerned rather with the meaning and goal of the history of the individual and of the eschatological community...

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1 Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, II,79.
2 Ibid., I, 227.
3 Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, I, 229.

[which is fulfilled] wherever the Word of the proclamation establishes an encounter.[1]

Therefore, no cosmic telos is to be expected. Every such proposal amounts to a Weltanschauung which destroys the meaning of the individual and his present. It is not the world and its history but men that are judged and saved in and through the eschaton. The eschatological event occurs for each individual, each moment, in the historical challenge to live meaningfully - that is, to live responsibly "for the inheritance of the past in the face of the future."[2] Insofar as man grasps the responsibility in which he stands at each moment, he grasps the meaning of his life, and the eschatological event occurs.[3]

Bultmann thus transposes eschatology into the present, and reduces its dimensions from cosmic to personal. The results are that the question of the meaning of life in the perspective of death has, for him, an individual but not a more universal

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1 Bultmann, Kerygma and Myth, I, 116. Underlining mine.

2 Bultmann, Der Sinn Der Geschichte, p. 65. The full sentence reads: Denn die Verantwortung der Gegenwart ist im Grunde immer die Verantwortung für das Erbe der Vergangenheit angesichts der Zukunft.

3 Ibid.

significance. The structure of his thought will not permit the larger question concerning the salvation of mankind, and the meaning of the whole of human history in the light of its ending.

What, then, is Bultmann's position on this intimately personal and existentially significant question of the meaning of life in the perspective of death? No general answer should be ventured, for each man must discover the meaning of his own death, the meaning given in and with it. But, to the Christian, who has already abandoned a quest for worldly security, death does not stand as a threat to the meaning of his life. He knows that God's grace, and therefore the possibility of meaning, will meet him even in his death, and he stands ready to embrace God's grace by faith, meaning by responsibility, when death comes.

All attempts at a conceptual description of a life beyond death - of a consummation of meaning - are necessarily mythological and, to the modern mind, repulsive. Indeed, St. Paul "refrains from

depicting the conditions of the resurrection life,"[1] and prefers to speak of that which is "not seen,"[2] when "I shall understand fully even as I have been fully understood."[3] Bultmann concludes that "It belongs to the radical surrender to God's grace that we renounce all pictures of a future after death and hand over everything to the grace of God, who gives what is to come."[4]

But, just this grace of God, which is already the life and <u>therefore</u> also the future hope of the Christian, "does not disappoint."[5] God's love has already brought the Christian from death to life many times, and he knows that that love is faithful. In this experience of God's faithfulness is grounded the conviction that nothing, "neither death, nor life..., nor anything else in all creation, will be

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1 Bultmann, <u>Theology of the New Testament</u>, I, 346. See also <u>Der Sinn Der Geschichte</u>, p. 58. Bultmann does observe that, according to Paul, "'life' has a future beyond life in the 'flesh,'" and that such a life is conceived of as a <u>somatic</u> existence, for "if man were no longer <u>soma</u> - if he no longer had a relationship to himself - he would no longer be man." <u>Theology of the New Testament</u>, I, 346, 198. It is difficult to know to what extent Bultmann embraces as his own what he here correctly describes as Paul's position.

2 II Cor. 4:18.

3 I Cor. 13:12.

4 Rudolf Bultmann, <u>The Honest to God Debate</u> (London: S.C.M. Press, 1963), p. 139, ft.

5 Rom. 5:5.

able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."[1] "For him who knows himself loved...it becomes clear that...death forthwith loses its character as the limit. The question concerning death becomes superfluous...."[2] Death has "lost its power."[3] Bultmann again refers to St. Paul:

> None of us lives to himself
> and none of us dies to himself.
> If we live, we live to the Lord,
> And if we die, we die to the Lord;
> So then, whether we live or whether we die,
> We are the Lord's.[4]

For the man who understands himself as God's, life and death "have lost their charm and terror respectively."[5] He faces the world free, as... one who participates in the tumult of the world, but does so with an inner aloofness - 'as if (he did it) not.'"[6] The meaning of his life finds its fulfillment and guarantee not in the fading realm of the transitory, but solely in the Eternal

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1 Rom. 8:38, 39. Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, I, 352.
2 Bultmann, Existence and Faith, p. 103.
3 Ibid., p. 100.
4 Rom. 14:7, 8. Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, I, 331.
5 Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, I, 352.
6 Ibid., p. 351.

God of Love. In Him, and only in Him, "ultimate meaning and ultimate goal comes to its own."[1]

VI

What is the meaning of Life? What is the relationship of the experiences which compose life to their ultimate source and goal? Bultmann's answer to this question may be summarized in the following points:

I. No general answer should be given. Man's finite creatureliness means that his perspective is limited by his concrete historical existence so that he is not able to give a comprehensive, all embracing answer which corresponds to reality. He is not above history but in it. Furthermore, every projected Weltanschauung tends to cheat the individual of his unique, personal significance, and of the importance of his personal decisions as to what will be the meaning of his life.

II. But personal answers should be given. The possibility of a meaning-ful life occurs as a man allows

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1 Ibid., p. 352.

his security to be crucified with Christ so that he may live only by the grace of God given anew every morning - that is, as he abandons all attempts to secure his life in the world, and bases his life upon God. But, to base his life upon God is not an abstract proposal. Rather, it is to live in response to the Word of God, the divine imperative, the call to a meaningful existence which is given in concrete, specific, historical moments, and particularly in encounter with the neighbor. The Word of God is this ever-fresh, historical call to abandon personal security and live meaningfully, and therefore responsibly, for those round about. But, this is a purely formal statement, and the actual content of what it means to live meaningfully for the neighbor can only be given in the particular situation, and must be given over anew in each historical moment.

III. To thus live meaningfully is to realize authentic existence or eschatological existence. Insofar as a man grasps the responsibility in which he stands at each moment, he grasps the meaning of his life, and the eschatological event occurs for him. No cosmic telos or ecbaton is to be contemplated or

expected, since such generalities imply a Weltanschauung.

IV. Confronted by the end of his life, each man must discover the meaning of his own death. But, for the Christian, death does not have the character of a threat. It is simply the final event in this life. The Christian knows that God's grace will meet him, and therefore the possibility of meaning will meet him, in this final event as it has met him in the other events of his life. He stands ready to embrace whatever meaning the God of grace will give when death comes.

It is apparent from the beginning that Bultmann is sensitive to and sympathetic with the mind of twentieth century man. He seeks to rid the kerygma of the kind of dogmatic statements which obscure the true meaning of faith. If man is to be offended by the gospel, then the theologian must see to it that it is the gospel which offends him, and not an intellectual legalism founded upon an outdated picture of the world. Bultmann's position, that faith is qualitatively different from believing this or that, is made with such force and clarity that it can only be

appreciated. But, a sensitive awareness of the problem does not necessarily imply a constructive solution. Although there is much to appreciate in Bultmann's theological and philosophical suggestions, his answer to the question of the meaning of life is seriously lacking in constructive proposals. The weakness at point is not one of internal inconsistency (though inconsistencies there are),[1] but of unexplored possibility rejected out of hand, with a subsequent lack of the kind of comprehensiveness which could make Bultmann's answer genuinely helpful.

Bultmann considers it categorical that no Weltanschauung corresponding to reality is possible, and that any suggested Weltanschauung tends to cheat the individual of the importance of his personal life. That there is a certain degree of truth in this position is rather widely recognized today, and the complex of European theologians and philosophers generally classified as "existentialist" indicate substantial, though varyingly qualified, agreement. But, that the rejection of every kind of Weltanschauung is, in fact, a possibility is by no means transparent, and its desirability has not

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1 See, for example, the criticism on p. 120 ft. 1 this paper.

actually been established. The following points are to be noted:

1. Honesty demands a great deal of humility before the cosmic whole. Experience does not yield an immediate and obvious principle of interpretation. Bultmann's position is that man has no transcendent perspective from which to view reality, but only the very relative perspective given in and with his own existence (hence, existentialism). But, it needs to be noted that, because this existence is human existence, man is not totally without a transcendent viewpoint, and it is this characteristically human phenomenon which makes the general question remain even when its validity has been denied. Indeed, the (in itself true) observation that a man's perspective is limited by his existence both presupposes and indicates a position of transcendence which makes the observation possible. The argument thus contains its own counter-argument. This does not, of course, invalidate the observation that every perspective is a limited, finite one. What it does do is point to the ambiguity which remains. To recognize man's finitude does not - just because it is man's finitude (or "historicity") - necessitate the conclusion that

no Weltanschauung corresponding to reality is possible. What it does do is point to the fact that no Weltanschauung corresponding to reality can be found which is not in some sense subject to distortion, and to the further fact that an accurate Weltanschauung will necessarily take the ambiguities of existential distortion into account.

2. It is actually difficult to know whether Bultmann rejects every attempt at a scientific Weltanschauung because such an interpretation does not square with the facts, or because the facts themselves do not please him, and he is reluctant to accept the general interpretation which they suggest. A good deal of hostility against a Weltanschauung is, upon close examination, very much like disguised dissatisfaction with facts as they are, and unwillingness to draw the conclusions which those facts imply. If Bultmann were to limit his criticism of every Weltanschauung to a warning lest the pretenses at omniscience and the reduction of history to mechanics which are integral to the philosophies of Hegel and Marx become the Christian theologian's temptations, it would not be difficult to sympathize with him. But in rejecting every Weltanschauung, Bultmann is, in fact, coming

indeterminably close to committing the very fallacy he fears - that is, allowing his judgement on the whole of history to be determined by his own "historicity," the tragic events within the German nation during the last fifty years.

Bultmann is, of course, aware that in Pauline thought "the history of nations is salvation history, and its origin, its guidance, and its goal are all in God,"[1] but confesses that "for my part, the only interpretation I can give the Pauline and...synoptic eschatology is a critical one."[2] At this point it is not a demythologizing of the New Testament but an open difference with it that is at stake.

It is, therefore, difficult to separate the conclusion that the facts of experience validate no Weltanschauung from the conclusion that the facts of experience validate no Weltanschauung acceptable to Bultmann.[3] But, the distinction is critical. For, once the distinction is recognized, the rejection of a Weltanschauung is at least suspect of being

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1 Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, I, 229.
2 Bultmann, Kerygma and Myth, I, 116.
3 There is an ironical similarity between Bultmann's hostility to any Weltanschauung and Barth's arbitrary, dogmatic one. Both men are afraid of or unconcerned with what the facts of experience may suggest.

considerably less than an objectively founded conclusion.

Indeed, while the rejection of a Weltanschauung may not in itself be a Weltanschauung (it may just be a tentatively held hypothesis), it can easily become a principle of interpretation, and when it does, it becomes a Weltanschauung. And, since the function of a Weltanschauung is to give a general insight into the nature of reality, when its rejection is founded on nothing other than personal dissatisfaction with the interpretation which the facts of nature and history suggest, this new Weltanschauung is likely to be an arbitrary one indeed, and one that renders suspect the whole subsequent undertaking.

When Bultmann rules that no genuine Weltanschauung is possible, he is making an epistemological judgement which may or may not be true. But, when he declares that history considered as a whole is meaningless,[1] he is making a deduction of great consequence from a premise which is certainly subject to challenge, and which is considerably different from his own

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1 See pp. 106, 130 this paper.

epistemological premise. It is one thing to say "we can not know." It is another matter to say "we can know that there is no general meaning." The second affirmation is concluded from a Weltanschauung which it would be difficult to distinguish from chaos.[1] There is something of a tragedy-determined (or even nihilist-determined) Weltanschauung operative beneath Bultmann's epistemological ruling "no Weltanschauung," and its influence appears with distressing frequency.

Some Weltanschauung is always latently or overtly present. The best Weltanschauung is that which is suggested by Biblical faith, and which is overtly present so that it may be subject to testing, correction and reinterpretation by the facts of nature and history in accordance with the state of knowledge at any particular time.

3. Each man's existence is such that he is interwoven in a complex of nature and history. He is a

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1 Marjorie Grene writes of Heidegger: "The weakness of even the best of existential writing is precisely that it lacks a proper ontology. It is a floating philosophy - vivid as autumn leaves, but as incapable as they of taking hold again of a parent branch....The trouble with Heidegger's ontology is... that it is spurious ontology." Marjorie Grene, Heidegger (London: Bowes & Bowes, 1957) pp. 14, 15.

part - however unique a part - of a larger whole. His existence is an existence *in* the physical universe, *in relation to* other historical creatures. A considerable portion if not all of the experiences which compose his life are determined by this relationship to the natural and historical worlds. It is difficult, therefore, to see how the part may have meaning if the whole has none. How can meaning arise for the individual in concrete encounter with a world and its history which remains essentially meaningless? Does not Bultmann's insistence that meaning for the individual demands *responsibility* for the neighbor actually *imply* the existence of meaning on a social and historical level? Or, is man simply under an undefined responsibility to a meaningless world to *give* it meaning? If so, where does God come in?

Bultmann's thinking on this matter is disturbingly unconstructive. Confronted with the fact that the individual's life is interwoven with a larger historical whole, he recommends abandoning any search for meaning in the whole in the interest of responsible decision in the concrete situation.[1]

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1 Bultmann, *History and Eschatology*, p. 155.

Apparently it never occurs to him that responsible decision in the present may depend upon some general understanding of from whence history is coming and whither it is going. As an admonition to action as opposed to idle speculation his recommendation has some merit. For, surely meaning is to be found in responsibility to the concrete present. To this extent, Bultmann's point is well taken. But, as a theological and philosophical judgement, Bultmann's position is intolerable. For, it denies the validity of a general question which must be answered if the answer to the individual question is to make any sense. The part which only has meaning in responsibility to another part or to the whole, can hardly find meaning in responsibility to a whole which is meaningless.

This observation gives added credence to Macquarrie's observation that Bultmann's individualism does not develop into an adequate concept of "being-with-one-another,"[1] and Ogden's description of existential analysis as an "anthropological fragment"[2] because it "does not consistently acknowledge the full scope

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1 Macquarrie, An Existentialist Theology, pp. 90, 95, 211, 213, 215.

2 Ogden, Christ Without Myth, p. 178.

of the philosophical task."[1] Ogden recommends that the "fragment" be united with a general ontology such as that contained in the process philosophy of Charles Hartshorne.[2] A thorough-going existentialist who nevertheless has understood the necessity of a constructive analysis of history is Karl Jaspers. His general ontology holds considerably more promise than contemporary theologians have been inclined to recognize.[3] Another proposal that deserves examining is the very suggestive work of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin in The Phenomenon of Man.[4] Certainly the "fragment" character of Bultmann's theology - its independence from a general ontology, a doctrine of God, and a constructive interpretation of history - considerably reduces its value as an analysis and description of Christian self-understanding. For, the life of the self is a life in the physical and historical world.

Emil Brunner, with keen perception, writes that:

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1 Ibid., p. 176.
2 Ibid., p. 177, 178. See Charles Hartshorne The Divine Relativity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948).
3 Karl Jaspers, The Origin and Goal of History, trans. by Michael Bullock (Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., London, 1953). (See also pp.326f. this paper).
4 Trans. by Bernard Wall (London, Collins, 1959).

> The mind, wherever it is truly living, cannot but ask for a total meaning, and it is through the intensity of this question that the aliveness of the spirit manifests itself. Where the question of total meaning ceases to be asked, the spirit is in a state of disintegration.[1]

He therefore judges existentialist thought to compose a "philosophy of despair, hidden in a number of more or less subtle evasions of the problem."[2] Bultmann's anthropology (methodologically speaking) tears man the individual asunder from his heritage in the human race and in the natural universe. Thus, Bultmann's very attempt to assure meaning for the individual, by protecting him from reduction to an instance of a general rule, has itself become a threat - a threat to the very possibility of any meaning. For, what is left of man when his heritage in nature and history have been judged meaningless? Responsible decision, through which Bultmann would reunite man with his heritage, is then very much like responsibility to the void. It is, in fact, difficult to see what "responsibility" could mean in such a situation.

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1 Emil Brunner, Christianity and Civilization, (London: Nisbet & Co. Ltd., 1948) Vol. I, 62.
2 Ibid., p. 73.

This amorphous character of "responsibility" in Bultmann's thought is noted with force in Barth's observation that the "nearest solution" to an understanding of Bultmann is that he "is simply a Lutheran."[1] He is restating, and perhaps overstating, "the Lutheran doctrine of the two realms."[2] Bultmann's emphasis upon authentic existence as "escape" from the "ultimately empty and unreal" world is a case at point - however much he may intend "desecularization" rather than a "dualistic world view."[3] Barth asks, "can we really subsume under the rubric 'detachment from the world' all the New Testament has to say about life in faith?" He concludes that "there is something seriously lacking here."[4] Bultmann's thought "is not too far from the Lutheran bishops on political issues, especially on the practical decisions which Germany faces to-day."[5]

An example will clarify the point at issue. Bultmann is surely right that:

> It is an illusion to suppose that real security can be gained by men organizing their own personal and community life. There are encounters

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1 Karl Barth, Kerygma and Myth, II, 121.
2 Ibid., p. 122, 123.
3 See pp. 111 f. this paper.
4 Barth, op. cit., p. 94.
5 Ibid., p. 122.

> and destinies which man cannot master. He cannot secure endurance for his works. His life is fleeting and its end is death. History goes on and pulls down all the towers of Babel again and again. There is no real and definitive security, and it is precisely this illusion to which men are prone to succumb in their yearnings for security.[1]

But, it needs to be asked if man really supposes that he is finding "definitive security" when he organizes his personal and community life, or if he, in fact, imagines that he is securing "endurance for his works." Does Bultmann intend the allusion to the tower of Babel to be an appropriate description of all of man's social and political efforts? Is there not something highly irresponsible in the implications of Bultmann's position?

Bultmann does not himself know what he means by "responsibility." The source of the confusion is in his previous decision that secular history is meaningless. It calls for no elaborate logic to recognize that if meaning on an individual level demands responsibility for the neighbor, then this implies the existence of meaning on a social and historical level. Bultmann's unwillingness to find meaning in secular history thus threatens his

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1 Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology, pp. 39, 40.

personal concern to find meaning for the individual, since he proposes that individual meaning is realised through responsible decisions about life in history.

The conclusions to be drawn are (1) that the development of a Weltanschauung which (allowing for existential distortion) in some sense corresponds to reality can not be ruled out as a possibility; (2) that the development of a Weltanschauung should be suggested by Biblical faith, and be subject to testing, correction and reinterpretation by the ever emerging facts of life in nature and history; (3) that such a Weltanschauung is necessary because without it the life of the individual, empirically grounded in nature and history, is necessarily threatened with meaninglessness.

Bultmann's answer to the question of the meaning of life has been found seriously lacking. The weakness has been shown to be one which threatens his whole answer with meaninglessness. It is, however, important to note that the threat is only a threat. The general enthusiasm with which Bultmann has been received on the theological scene indicates that many men have been able to identify themselves with the constructive aspects of his thought, fragmentary though these may be. Judgement falls not upon

existential analysis, but upon Bultmann's failure and unwillingness to develop the analysis beyond the limits of individual anthropology - a weakness not necessarily implicit in the analysis itself.

Bultmann is not really interested in the larger vision of responsible life in a responsible society, or in the yet larger Pauline vision of the redemption of nature. But, it is just as a part of a social-political reality, within a physical universe, that man must live his life. This points to the fact that theology, if it is to be helpful, must be comprehensive rather than fragmentary, systematically related to other areas of life and knowledge rather than an isolated reflection upon personal existence.

CHAPTER IV

The Meaning of Life

in the

Theology of Karl Heim

I

There are two preliminary factors which should be noted in approaching the thought of Karl Heim. The first and most obvious of these is his profound concern that theology enter into a dialogue with the world of natural science. "If Christianity is not to allow itself to be relegated to the ghetto, if it is convinced that it has a universal message for the entire world and that like Paul it is 'a debtor both to the wise and to the unwise' (i.e. not only to the uneducated but also to the educated, most of whom today are people with an education in the natural sciences and technology), then there is no avoiding discussion between the upholders of the Christian faith and the students of the physical universe."[1] Heim believes it is one of the real tragedies of the modern church that "soon after the time of Schleiermacher, Protestant theology severed its connexion with philosophy in order to become an

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1 Karl Heim, Christian Faith and Natural Science, trans. by Neville Horton Smith (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1953), p. 5.

independent field of science. Since then it has shown more and more reluctance to undertake the difficult task of opposing the world-picture of disbelief with a world-picture of belief."[1]

Of course, the separation of religion from other realms of knowledge has had a certain "advantage" for the religious man in that he is "not disturbed by the advance of science. But, naturally, the other practical result...is that no physicist, nor chemist, nor biologist will ever again be disturbed by religion. He can work away in his room, untroubled by the idea of God, in the consciousness that he is in quest of that which alone can be truly established as certain."[2] Over against this, Heim points out that the Apostles "did not contend for a modest space in which to practise their religious exercises."[3] If theology is to come to grips with the modern mind it must abandon its program of isolation and plunge into the vast "whirlpool of relativity" in which

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1 Ibid., p. 26.
2 Karl Heim, The New Divine Order, trans. by Edgar P. Dickie (London: Harper and Brothers, 1930), p. 17.
3 Ibid., p. 16.

contemporary man has learned to swim.[1] For it is in the realm of natural science that we encounter the "spiritual phenomenon characteristic of our age."[2]

The second preliminary factor to note is that Heim's great, six volume work, Der Evangelische Glaube und das Denken der Gegenwart, was conceived in the midst of the Nazi era. Heim, therefore, had to contend not merely with the secular thought of natural science but also with the demonic thought of National Socialism. While Hitler was claiming to be the "leader" (der Fuhrer) of the nation appointed by destiny, Heim wrote of another "leader," a leader for the whole of creation, appointed by God. These Christological works, Jesus der Herr and Jesus der Weltvollender were "passed from hand to hand" in German prison camps.[3] The whole of his work abounds

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1 "Den Strudel des Relativismus," Karl Heim, Glaube und Leben (Berlin: Im Furche-Verlag, 1928), p. 406. Heim makes reference here and throughout his other writings both to the historic or cultural relativity of Spengler and the general relativity theory developed by Einstein which is presently one of the bases of modern science. (Ibid., pp. 377-429). This essay was actually written in 1921, and indicates Heim's early awareness of the problem.

2 Karl Heim, The Transformation of the Scientific World View, trans. by W.A. Whitehouse (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1953), pp. 16f.

3 Karl Heim, Jesus the World's Perfecter, trans. by D.H. van Daalen (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1959), p. vii.

in appreciation of and yet a tortured concern over the German culture of which he was an intimate part.[1]

These two factors, then, a vital interest in dialogue with the world of natural science and the tragic necessity of confronting National Socialism and its aftermath, are always present in the background, and often in the foreground of Heim's thought. Together they account for his sensitive awareness of the "secular mind," its content and attitudes. Heim believes that the church has, in many cases, missed an adequate appreciation of the working of the secular mind. Theologians have failed to take account of the fact that genuine secularism is the "necessary consequence of a conception of the universe which, precisely because of its simplicity and perspicuity and its elimination of all kinds of obscure, metaphysical, cosmic substrata, presents itself with the force of evidence to the people of the machine age who have lived through two world wars."[2] The consequence is that many of the questions pondered so

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1 Karl Heim, "Responsibility and Destiny: The Difference Between Hauer's View and the Message of the Bible and the Reformers," Germany's New Religion, trans. by T.S.K. Scott-Craig and R.E. Davies (London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1937), pp. 87-113. The title of Heim's essay is sufficient to indicate its polemic character.

2 Heim, Christian Faith and Natural Science, p. 24. Underlining mine.

deeply by theology (including the question of the meaning of life) are simply not being asked outside the confines of the church. "The genuine 'men of the world' - and we come up against them in barrack rooms and officers' messes far more often in the second than in the first world war - can be recognised precisely by the fact that the fundamental questions, which within the milieu of the Church provoke lively discussion...are no longer mentioned at all by these true secularists."[1] Indeed, the "man of the world" has simply "found no answer to these questions, and he does not expect an answer from anyone else, least of all from a religious apologist."[2]

Like Bultmann, Heim recognizes that the general thought-structure of the New Testament has "grown out of the mythological space-picture of the primitives," which is no longer tenable by the modern mind.[3] Therefore, before theology can pursue its central task of expounding the doctrines of the faith, it must first turn its attention to a preliminary question. "But this preliminary question is a

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1 Ibid., p. 16.
2 Ibid., p. 17.
3 Ibid., p. 165.

fundamental one, because the entire edifice is in danger of collapse if it remains unanswered."[1] Theology must first turn its attention toward the construction of a "philosophical basis" which, in contrast to the secular world-view, will make room for the possibility of thought concerning God. "That is the question on which everything depends," and unless it is answered convincingly, nothing else which theology has to say is likely to be heard.[2] "We have no right to raise a passionate protest against...secularism...and to oppose it as a rebellion against God...so long as we are not in a position to propose...[a tenable] alternative..., another conception of the universe and one in which nature and man appear in a different light."[3]

In undertaking this preliminary task Heim thinks that an adequate philosophical basis must be "independent of momentary currents of scientific opinion."[4] Indeed, to be secure it is necessary to discover a basis "which lies from the outset outside the whole scope of natural science,...a firm point which cannot be subjected to the spatial and temporal

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1 Ibid., p. 31.
2 Ibid., p. 33.
3 Ibid., p. 24.
4 Ibid., p. 32.

measurements with which natural science works."[1] Heim believes he has located such a basis in the existence of the ego. "the first, immediate datum... [which] is closest and most intimately known to all of us."[2] Indeed, the ego, which can so easily be overlooked while seeking information about the objective world, is nevertheless always the "first reality" which must be recognized as the "active subject in the whole process of scientific knowing, whose existence must be presupposed if natural science is to be 'possible in the first place'."[3] Over against the realm of scientifically observable objects, it is necessary to recognize the realm of the personal ego, "the I of which I am always already aware before any objective knowledge enters my mind."[4]

Heim believes that "it is evident that this reality belongs to a region lying outside three-dimensional space."[5] "My ego is 'non-objectifiable',"[6] it is "on this side of all objectivity."[7]

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1 Ibid.
2 Ibid., p. 35.
3 Ibid., p. 33.
4 Ibid., p. 47.
5 Ibid., p. 45. Underlining mine.
6 Ibid., p. 105.
7 Ibid., p. 39.

He does not thereby wish to deny the intimate dependence of the ego upon bio-chemical processes. He is aware that its existence may be explained as an "effect produced by material processes." But this dependence "makes no difference at all in understanding the peculiar relationship which we are here investigating."[1] The critical fact to note is that "we live simultaneously in another sphere, the non-observational sphere."[2] The ego subject cannot itself become an object; the "I" does not belong to the world of "it."[3] Thus, it is necessary to recognize that "the objective world, with which in the natural sciences we are exclusively concerned,...is not the whole of reality but is only one space into which everything is fitted. There exists simultaneously a second space.... This is the non-objective space in which the I and the Thou encounter one

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1 Ibid., p. 44.

2 Karl Heim, The World: Its Creation and Consummation, trans. by Robert Smith (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), p. 65.

3 See Karl Heim, God Transcendent: Foundation for a Christian Metaphysic, trans. by Edgar P. Dickie (London: Nisbet and Co., Ltd., 1935), particularly chapter IV. Heim gives generous recognition of his indebtedness to Martin Buber.

another."[1]

This non-objective space is, however, characterised by the fact that it is not, in truth, one space but a multitude of self-contained spaces. Every individual "I" exists in a realm of its own so that the "I" of one person is outside the reach of the "I" of another. Every ego is in some sense isolated. There is a "boundary which separates my world from yours."[2]

The situation is made yet more complex (or, perhaps, more simple) by the fact that our different "spaces" share the same general objective content. "The boundary which separates my world from yours is one not of content but of dimension."[3] This is what Heim refers to as "the whole paradoxical secret of the co-existence of spaces."[4] He illustrates his thought by reference to "two infinite planes intersecting at an angle."[5] Where they cross they share

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1 Heim, Christian Faith and Natural Science, p. 108. Heim is responsible for the oft quoted likening of the discovery of the "Thou" to a "Copernican revolution" in the history of thought. Ibid., p. 162. Heim used this expression as early as 1921. See Glaube und Leben, p. 331.

2 Heim, God Transcendent, p. 86. The thought is important and becomes the conceptual framework for Heim's understanding of guilt. See p. 170 this paper.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., p. 65.

5 Ibid., p. 51.

the same content without bounding one another. Thus, each "dimension" or "space" may "make claim to represent the same reality."[1] The "space" of each particular ego, my space and your space, is characterized by the fact that we share the same boundary of content while being separated by the boundary of dimension.[2]

How then is it possible that one "I" is able to communicate with another "I"? Heim answers this question by pointing to "the encounter between I and Thou in dialogue, in which the [objective] 'word' brings about a mysterious relationship between the two [subjective] spaces."[3] And again, "the Word is that element of my consciousness-world, which has the prerogative, above everything else, of being the place at which the Other and his consciousness-world is disclosed to me."[4]

This brief outline of dimensional thinking composes the philosophical basis which Heim suggests as a living alternative to the secular world view (which attempts to close the whole of reality into

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1 Ibid., p. 65.
2 Ibid., chapter II.
3 Heim, The World: Its Creation and Consummation, p. 154.
4 Heim, God Transcendent, p. 168.

the "space" of objectivity). The theological implications should be immediately apparent. Heim has not attempted to establish the existence of God by rational means. He has undertaken to suggest a rational world-view which is large enough to include the possibility of belief in God. There is "room" for God within this alternative world-view. It is possible to think about God without imagining him to be at some distant place "beyond" our universe. In pointing to the various "dimensions" or "spaces" with which we are already familiar in our experience although we cannot objectify them, Heim makes tenable a belief in the transcendent God who is beyond objectification but who nevertheless supports our created world while inhabiting eternity, conceived as a "wholly other"[1] dimensional space. "The presence of God is a space, encompassing the whole of reality."[2] At the same time he points to the event which moves Christian faith to belief in this transcendent God, the experience that in Christ God has spoken.

The second great philosophical concept which supports Heim's theology is what he refers to as the

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1 Ibid., p. 187.
2 Heim, Christian Faith and Natural Science, p. 171.

law or fact of polarity. While the concept of dimensional thinking is meant to point to realities beyond the objective world, the concept of polarity is intended to express the character of the whole of the world in which we live. It is "the structural law of our existence."[1] The term "polar" or "polarity" is used by Heim to indicate the reality whereby nothing in the world exists as and unto itself, but only in relation to something else, so that all things "mutually condition each other and can only exist in this state of mutual conditioning."[2] The truth of our existence is that all situations in life "are merely variations on this theme, which we recognise everywhere once we have made ourselves acquainted with it."[3] Its importance for the question of the meaning of life emerges in the tragic fact that "reality is constituted from the play of opposing forces, the weaker giving way eventually to the stronger."[4] Heim summarizes this demonic character of polarity in the line:

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1 Karl Heim, Jesus the Lord, trans. by D.H. van Daalen (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1959), p. 21.

2 Heim, The World: Its Creation and Consummation, p. 153.

3 Heim, Jesus the Lord, p. 13. For example, no moment of time exists without being conditioned by a previous moment and itself determining a future moment.

4 Heim, The Transformation of the Scientific World View, p. 14.

Into my power you must fall,
because I'm big and you are small.[1]

The ego-isolation of human beings, which is the root and source of our inevitable sin,[2] is not without its parallel in the rest of the living world. "The animal which needs other creatures for its nourishment is so adapted that it has no restraint when it destroys these other creatures. The sufferings of its victims lie beyond the threshold of its consciousness and in no way affect its inner being."[3] The whole situation of polarity as it is universally experienced can only be described as a "curse."[4]

Recognition of the fact of polarity naturally gives birth to the question of a non-polar or supra-polar state of existence in which this mutual conditioning and demonic dependence comes to a peaceful rest. Heim is keenly sensitive to the fact that no such world is availible for our objective verification. Philosophically he is only interested in its being recognized as conceivable.[5] Theologically,

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1 Ibid., p. 256.
2 See pp. 170 f. this paper.
3 Heim, The World: Its Creation and Consummation, p. 107.
4 Heim, Jesus the Lord, p. 21.
5 Heim, The World: Its Creation and Consummation, p. 154.

however, it provides him with a tenable conceptual framework for the Christian hope.[1] Deliverance from the polar into a supra-polar state of existence is a conceptual description of the consummation.[2] Of course, "concepts without intuitions are empty."[3] But, the Christian hope is that "when polarity is abolished,...the realm of the omnipresence of God becomes just as much a form of intuition...as is the present three-dimensional physical space.... We can 'see God,' for we live in the intuitive form of eternity."[4]

These two major philosophical contributions, that of dimensional thinking and that of polarity, provide the conceptual tools Heim uses in speaking of God and the world.

II

In considering the teleological dimension to the question of the meaning of life, the general

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1 Also, it provides the basis for Heim's conceptual description of God. He says "God is beyond all polarity." Heim, Jesus the Lord, p. 24.

2 Heim, The World: Its Creation and Consummation, pp. 101-150. See also p. 189 this paper.

3 Ibid., p. 118. Heim is quoting Kant.

4 Ibid.

question "What is God's purpose for man?", Heim first proposes a preliminary answer which emerges both from Biblical exegesis and from his studies in natural science, particularly biological evolution. He believes that the hand of God can be seen in the development of life throughout the ages. Indeed, in retrospect it is possible to affirm that "all creatures work together to make possible the existence of this unique creature in whom the creation of the world is perfected."[1] Biological evolution must be understood as constituting not a "chaos" of "confused developments," but rather as a "planned ascent, leading to an end and reaching a perfection which can no longer be surpassed," i.e. the emergence of homo sapiens.[2] From the strictly scientific point of view, "with the birth of Man something entirely new appears....This new thing is technical intelligence, for which the theft of fire and the blazing torch have remained the shining symbols for all ages. This is the mysterious ability to control the powers of nature by deliberate reflexion...which

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1 Ibid., p. 35.
2 Ibid., p. 56.

gives Man a unique place in the whole natural world and exalts him."[1]

This scientific observation is not without its theological counterpart. The Genesis story tells us that "man's creation in the image of God has the necessary consequence of his dominion over all creation."[2] Indeed, in the scientific and theological fact of man's "dominion," we find the "carrying out [of] the 'Führer' (leader) principle all along the line."[3] But the theological fact of man's dominion is not to be identified with man's technical intelligence, but rather, is to be understood as a parallel.[4] The difference consists in the fact that, theologically speaking, man's "dominion" is a gift in which God bestows upon man "a share of His own dominion over the world."[5] This "gift" is not an entity which man can claim as his own (i.e. technical intelligence). It "consists of nothing but decrees, which bring men face to face with decisions having eternal significance."[6] These decrees come to man from entirely "outside the material system

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1 Ibid., pp. 61, 64.
2 Ibid., p. 79.
3 Ibid., p. 36. "Führer" is Heim's apologetic equivalent of "lord." See pp. 172 f. this paper.
4 Ibid., p. 79.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid., p. 81.

of causality," and so outside the realm of the scientifically objectifiable.[1] They, therefore, do not confront man with a causal "compulsion," but with a "summons to decision."[2] Through these decrees each individual man is given his person, his time and his place.[3] Thus every particular man's life is "endowed with an absolute significance and an eternal meaning" through the fact that "this point in space and time is the place which God has appointed for me by His eternal decree."[4] The meaning of every man's life depends "solely on a decision of God, who exalts us from our creaturely humility and gives us an eternal purpose."[5]

This answer to the teleological dimension of the question can only be considered preliminary and tentative. This is true because the analysis has not yet included a consideration of "the decisive obstacle to the life of man" and to the possibility of his leading a meaningful life.[6] "The deepest meaning of our human existence...depends on whether with utter manly sincerity we have come to grips with the guilt

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1 Ibid.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., p. 64.
4 Ibid., p. 65.
5 Ibid., p. 82.
6 Heim, Jesus the World's Perfecter, p. 27.

that separates us from God, or whether at this decisive point we have been shirking."[1] However unfortunate and unappealing it may be, the question of the meaning of life can only be understood in terms of this previous fact, that "guilt is the central question of our life."[2]

Heim believes that this tragic fact of guilt "is already contained in the root-form of our existence, with which we are born into the world."[3] This fact becomes apparent as soon as it is recognized that in the nature of life as we know it "none of us can look directly into the sphere of consciousness of another."[4] Man's existence is characterized by the fact that every particular ego can directly sense only the joys and sorrows of itself. Communication and a dim sense of sympathetic participation in the life of another is indeed a possibility, but is not the primary fact. "The command 'rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep' can therefore always be only approximately fulfilled."[5] Consequently, "any mutual exchange, any sharing in

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1 Ibid., p. 29. Underlining mine.
2 Ibid., p. 31.
3 Heim, The World: Its Creation and Consummation, p. 104.
4 Heim, Christian Faith and Natural Science, p. 84.
5 Ibid., p. 85.

the destiny of another...can always take place only [with difficulty and] by indirect means."[1] "The capacity which men like Himmler have in such high degree, of treading on corpses and looking on without remorse while others are tortured to death, is only the last and most terrible exaggeration of something which lies in each one of us, and which is the simple result of the fact that...everyone else's world of experience is hermetically sealed to me...[so that] the other person remains for me 'an eternally strange Thou.'"[2] This world in itself is simply not a fellowship, but is by the very nature of its existence an accumulation of isolated egos, which is a very different thing. The inevitable facts of sin and guilt find their unfortunate origin in the very nature of this isolated ego.

In this situation of ego isolation and the subsequent tragic-guilt which characterized his existence, man himself is unable to solve his own problems. The ego isolation from whence arises his guilt is not just an isolation from his fellow men, but also an isolation from God, the giver of meaning.

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1 Ibid.
2 Heim, The World: Its Creation and Consummation, p. 104.

In this isolated situation it is not possible to deduce meaning from "the superficial picture that we have of God's creation.... It is of course a small matter for us on our own responsibility to philosophise on the meaning of creation and from our superficial impression to come to ingenious and profound assumptions. But all these again break on reality."[1] The question of the meaning of life simply "cannot be solved by speculating and having one's own ideas on these things."[2] The history of thought indicates that "the objective world can simply give me no answer to the question."[3] Help in the matter must be sought in another direction.

The significance which Heim places upon that "other direction" arises from the fact that he who was created to be a leader in fact needs a leader. "All that we have to say as regards the meaning of the world must start on the one hand from the fact that we need leadership and on the other hand from the fact that [Christ] and none other is the Leader."[4] Man can not obtain a meaningful life by his own

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1 Heim, Jesus the Lord, pp. 37 f.
2 Ibid., p. 44.
3 Heim, Christian Faith and Natural Science, p.208.
4 Heim, Jesus the Lord, p. 63.

efforts, but he can receive it as a gift. "In the ultimate question of life...we are dependent on something that comes to us 'from without' as the word of a Leader whom we ourselves have not chosen but who received authority from God."[1] When approaching the question of the meaning of life, Heim points toward a Christological answer.

Before developing more fully the content of the Christological answer, it should be noted that Heim is aware of the unlikelihood of everyone finding the leadership of Jesus to be acceptable. He raises with total seriousness the question: "Is there a means of persuading people?"[2] His conclusion is that no general affirmative answer can be given. However, "almost any occurrence, which disturbs us to the very depths of our being, may be the occasion whereby...eternity is disclosed to us."[3] What is more, "for innumerable people in all the centuries of modern history the one great and completely decisive occasion, which brought about the transformation of their entire view of the world, was," not finely organized arguments, but "the encounter

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1 Heim, Jesus the World's Perfecter, p. 62.
2 Heim, Christian Faith and Natural Science, p.232.
3 Ibid., p. 242.

with...Christ on earth and His journey to the Cross."[1] Not Polemics, therefore, but the gospel is the only answer. "Wherever someone reads the story of this death on the Cross, there somehow the question awakes in him, whether maybe the Crucified is not the One for whom our conscience is instinctively waiting."[2] Doubt concerning Christ can only be met by Christ, and conviction concerning the truth which is in him "can only fall into our laps...as a gift which we cannot ourselves procure but which, when it has been apportioned to us, we also cannot ourselves revoke."[3]

Heim, convinced of the impotence of human thought for discovering answers to ultimate questions, seeks to place his own thought under the "leadership" of Christ. The whole of his book Jesus The Lord has the force of a decisive confessional polemic in which he sees clearly and proclaims powerfully that the lordship of Christ determines for us what it means to have a "Leader" (Führer). In an age when "the whole world of ideas belonging to Rationalism, the French Revolution and German Idealism" has lost its force, and the world is "no longer...impelled

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1 Ibid.
2 Heim, Jesus the World's Perfecter, p. 107.
3 Heim, Christian Faith and Natural Science, p.247.

by ideas," a new appreciation has emerged for what the New Testament means by the Lordship of Christ.[1] Heim lists two preliminary characteristics of Lordship: (1) authority can only come from one person, "no man can serve two masters"; (2) the lord must be a living contemporary who confronts his subjects on the level of the present.[2] He then develops the idea of leadership in these words:

> True leadership depends only on the person of the leader. Where there is real leadership the led attach themselves to the leader unconditionally. They have infinite confidence in him. They do not ask him to bind himself to a programme for the future. They need his command for the present....We build our whole life, including our political and economic order, on sand if we do not build it on /the/ Leader's word....Every /human/ effort towards this end must rob the people who submit to it of their independence and so of their human dignity....There can be only one true Leader....If it is true, as the New Testament says, that in grappling with the ultimate questions we have been given a Lord of whom it can truly be said: "Without me you can do nothing," then we cannot even escape from His leadership when reflectingly we develop the content of the Christian faith.[3]

With this principle of Christ's lordship of leadership, Heim sets for himself the task of seeking an answer to the question of the meaning of life "by beginning from the fact of the dominion of Jesus and

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1 Heim, Jesus the Lord, pp. 57 f.
2 Ibid., pp. 51, 52.
3 Ibid., pp. 58-62.

then considering what this fact entails for an understanding of the world and of human existence."[1] The important point to grasp here is the seriousness with which Heim remains loyal to his own principle of Christ's sovereign leadership. He does not posit Christ's leadership as a first principle, and then move on to elaborate and develop conclusions which are to be deducted from this fact. Rather (and this point is crucial), he believes that when we subject our thought to the lordship of Christ the entire question comes to rest.

> We are released from the pressure of the question Why. We stand before the Creator, Who is present...as the One from Whom, through Whom, and for Whom are all things. In Him the question about the ultimate cause of the universe comes to rest. But...the halt...is not accompanied by the consciousness...that we have come to a standstill at a place arbitrarily chosen which points beyond itself...which in truth itself requires a higher authority to give to it the necessary sanction....On the contrary, the question Why comes to rest in God in a way which shows the standstill to be an inevitable necessity.[2]

Heim does not believe that this is all that can be said in answer to the question of the meaning of life.

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1 Ibid., p. 83.

2 Heim, God Transcendent, pp. 207, 208. See also Martin Buber, I and Thou, trans. by Ronald G. Smith (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937). "The question about the meaning of life is no longer there." p. 110.

But this is what must be said first, and it is determinative for all else. Instead of giving us a detailed rational program outlining the purpose and meaning of our existence, we have been given a person, a leader, and "communion with a living person takes the place of all philosophies."[1] The immediate consequence of this fact is that "the ultimate meaning of the creation of the whole world is comprised in Christ. He has the destiny of the world in His hands....In communion with Him...we become like children and begin to live by the original ground of creation, without reflexion."[2]

III

In considering the vocational dimension of the question of the meaning of life, with its emphasis upon meaning for the individual person, Heim recognises "the ultimate riddle of my personal existence."[3] With the passion of a poet he raises "the question

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1 Heim, Jesus the World's Perfecter, p. 223. See Heim's essay previously referred to, "Der Schicksalsgedanke als Ausdruck für das Suchen der Zeit" in Glaube und Leben, pp. 406-429. See also Edgar P. Dickie, Revelation and Response (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1933), particularly Chapter X.

2 Ibid., pp. 228, 229. Underlining mine.

3 Heim, Christian Faith and Natural Science, p. 197.

of why, amid the immense abundance and multiplicity of personalities which spring from the fertile soil of this earth like the flowers from a springtime meadow on a day in May, this one particular personality should be assigned to me as the role which I must assume and which I must play out to the bitter end."[1] Once again, he knows that the "objective world can simply give me no answer to the question."[2]

Heim has a sensitive awareness of the bankruptcy of attempts to answer the question in terms of what he calls "neuter nouns," such words as "life," "destiny" or "fate."[3] They have no power to bring us closer to the truth. "If I suppose that I have done something towards solving the riddle of my existence when I use impersonal words like destiny and fate, then either I have not seen the great question mark which hangs over my existence, or I am deliberately avoiding the question."[4] The fundamental error in this approach consists in having "confused myself with an object such as those

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1 Ibid., p. 207.
2 Ibid., p. 208.
3 Ibid., p. 202.
4 Heim, The Transformation of the Scientific World View, p. 115.

which stand over against me....I have confused my 'I' with an 'It'."[1] This mistaken impersonal presupposition leads to an impersonal and unsatisfactory conclusion. The problem of personal existence can not be solved in impersonal terms.

Heim's conviction on the matter emerges with the observation that "an 'I' cannot be commissioned by an 'It.' An 'I' can receive its call and its warrant only from an 'I'."[2] Thus, Heim speaks of "the most burning question of our practical life," which is the necessary complement to the question of our personal existence, the question of belief in the personal God.[3] Without this personal God, an answer to the question of a meaningful personal life is a priori impossible. Heim understands the difficult "I am that I am" passage of Exodus 3:14 as meaning that God's personal nature and being "rests upon itself." He does not need to be defined. Rather, he is the one who does the defining. Moses receives his commission, and thereby discovers his own person, in

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1 Ibid.

2 Heim, Christian Faith and Natural Science, p.202. The punctuation of different translators varies. In order to maintain consistency and clarity I have here inserted the off setting quotation marks.

3 Ibid., p. 203.

confrontation with the Personal God.[1] The individual and personal "I" can only find meaning in and from the Eternal and Personal "Thou." The search becomes consummated in the experience of prayer.[2]

The logical consequence of belief in and encounter with the personal God is recognition of the fact that "this Other, who has made me and given me to myself, has a claim on my whole life."[3] Personal meaning is, in fact, given to the individual in the form of a commission.[4] Because of the personal nature of this commission, and because of the isolated condition of every ego,[5] it is impossible to elaborate a general answer to the question of personal meaning. "A welter of mutual misunderstanding" is inevitable.[6] "He alone understands us...though all our fellow men condemn us."[7] Heim makes reference to J.S. Bach "to whom...it was a matter of indifference whether men understood his music provided that there was One to hear and to understand, One to whom he wished to offer all his

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1 Ibid., p. 210.
2 Ibid., p. 212.
3 Heim, The Transformation of the Scientific World View, p. 117.
4 Ibid., p. 247.
5 See p. 161 this paper.
6 Heim, The Transformation of the Scientific World View, p. 248.
7 Ibid., p. 249.

works as a thank-offering upon an altar."[1] And again, Heim thinks of St. Paul, who out of a deep sense of personal commission wrote, "Necessity is laid upon me."[2] Such a man "knows that even though all men reject the way he is going, it is the way ordained by the Power which has created and will perfect the whole world. What he is doing is in harmony with the origin and purpose of the universe."[3] Personal meaning enters a life when the personal God bestows a personal commission upon the individual.

IV

Because man's life is a life among men, because he is not alone but always one among many, he may not ask the question of the meaning of his life as though he were in isolation. His fellow man confronts him with the social or ethical dimension of the primary question. This is not the question of ethics in general. Rather, it is the question of the meaning of the individual life for and in relation to the life of the neighbor. Heim's thought on the matter is already contained in the

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1 Ibid.
2 I Cor. 9:16.
3 Heim, Christian Faith and Natural Science, p. 193.

description concerning the vocational dimension of the question.

The individual man finds a meaningful life in obedience to the commission of Christ, his Leader. The content of his commission finds its source, therefore, not in some given ethical principle, but in a living ethical personality. The meaning of an individual's life for and in relation to his neighbor may not be described as though it were some independent truth which could be applied apart from the leader's personal commission.

It is in precisely the context of this I-Thou, Follower-Leader relationship, however, that the meaning of the individual life for and in relation to the life of the neighbor becomes clear. "In the presence of God, there arises a new relation between you and me....As creatures of God we are responsible for one another. We bear one another's burdens."[1] In a sermon on the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) Heim speaks of such responsibility as the "One certain sign" of true discipleship. The meaning of my life for my neighbor is to be

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1 Ibid., p. 217.

found in "the man who is my Lazarus,...the man lying at my doorstep, who is wounded and needs my help, the man who has been waiting."[1] In obedience to the leadership of Christ, "I am simply driven to go to him. It is inevitable as that fire gives out heat that I should take his burden on my heart."[2]

This responsibility knows no limits. "If the omnipresent God is real, then there is a community among men which...rests on the fact that all men stand before God."[3] And this is a fact whether or not all men know it, whether or not there be "irreconcilable contradictions."[4] In personal encounter with Christ our Leader we learn that responsibility is the meaning of our life for our neighbour.

V

It is with regard to the ultimate or eschatological dimension that Heim's thought on the meaning of life finds its richest and fullest expression.

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1 Karl Heim, The Power of God trans. by L.M. Stalker (London: The Lutterworth Press, 1937), pp. 143, 144. Underlining mine. Heim's thought is closely aligned at this point with Barth (pp. 58 f. this peper) and Bultmann (pp. 125 f. this paper).

2 Ibid.

3 Heim, The Transformation of the Scientific World View, p. 249.

4 Ibid.

This is the question: What is the meaning of life in the perspective of death? or How can there be any valid meaning when and if life ends? It is the question concerning consummation.

Having lived as a German citizen during the first half of the twentieth century, Heim is deeply aware of and sensitive to the tragic character of human life, and the tentative as well as ambiguous nature of all of man's accomplishments, however meaningful they may at first seem. "Nietzsche could wax enthusiastic over the idea that we shall be whirled around in circles by this polar world system in a mad career for all eternity, as on a roundabout that we can never leap off....We men of the second world war, who have passed through...hell,...for us it is harder than it was for Nietzsche...to clap our hands and cry Encore!"[1] If this is the situation, "then life is not worth living."[2] Life is such that "we can only either despair of the meaning of existence or we must say that a condition of the world in which

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1 Heim, The World: Its Creation and Consummation, p. 110. Heim also takes Spengler to task for his realist-political relativity. See Glaube und Leben, pp. 374-405 and Jesus the Lord, p. 30.

2 Ibid. Heim asks "If nothingness eventually absorbs all things, is there anything at all that is of absolute importance?" in Jesus the World's Perfecter, p. 175.

these things are possible can only be borne as an intermediate stage, as a gateway to something else that follows and in which the meaning of these incomprehensible events finds fulfilment."[1]

Before turning to the ideas of consummation and fulfilment as contained in Heim's thought, further attention should be given to the meaning of this "intermediate stage." For, "the meaning...of this intervening time between the redemption and the perfecting of the world is the gathering of the Church."[2] By "Church" Heim does not mean a mere gathering of like-minded people in a voluntary religious society.[3] Our particular religious "attitude" is not determinative in the matter. "The ultimate question for us...is not...what attitude we adopt to Christ and His Plan....For we know the plan only in parts. The question which is decisive for our destiny is only what attitude Christ adopts to us."[4] The church exists as "the sovereign act" of Christ "by which He incorporates men into Himself and makes them into instruments through which He

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1 Heim, Jesus the World's Perfecter, p. 209.
2 Ibid., pp. 49, 50.
3 See Heim's sermon "The Invincibility of the Church" in The Power of God, pp. 96-109.
4 Heim, Jesus the World's Perfecter, p. 224.

can work."[1] Therefore, to be incorporated in the church is to experience a foretaste of the consummation, when God's sovereignty will be all in all. "It determines our destiny in the same way as the destiny of a soldier is determined by his enlistment. All that happens to him afterwards is implied in this."[2] The church exists in the world as the eschatological community in which there is already present a hidden "word of wisdom...a gift of the Spirit...a mystery," which will one day be revealed. For the present, those within the church "do not desire to probe into that which He has still concealed from them because they 'cannot yet bear' it."[3] If Christ is truly accepted as Leader, then, as regards the meaning of life, "the situation is the same as when during a war a general executes a great military plan in order to force the enemy to surrender. It is irrelevant to the execution of this plan whether the ordinary soldier...has a full understanding of the plan...or whether he is critical of it. For the plan is the general's business."[4]

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1 Ibid., p. 225.
2 Ibid.
3 Heim, Jesus the Lord, pp. 44, 45. John 16:12.
4 Heim, Jesus the World's Perfecter, p. 223.

Turning now to a further consideration of that "word of wisdom" which the church does have, Heim speaks of life and history as a "course which had a beginning and moves towards a goal." Life as we know it, the history of the church and of mankind, "all the stations of the Cross through which we have passed are only a transitional stage on the way to this destination."[1] This sense of a destination, a consummation, an ultimate telos is absolutely determinative for understanding Heim's thought. Both for individuals and for history as a whole there must be deliverance from "the curse of polarity."[2] Personal life must not end with death. It is impossible to think in terms of annihilation "if everything is not to be utterly meaningless."[3] The final rest in God "is not the rest of death nor the abolition of all distinctions, but the rest of perfection."[4] Those who emphasize "realized eschatology" to the neglect of an ultimate consummation "have given up fighting the battle for God to the very end."[5]

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1 Heim, The World: Its Creation and Consummation, p. 110.

2 Heim, Jesus the Lord, p. 24. See also p. 164 this paper.

3 Heim, The World: Its Creation and Consummation, p. 110.

4 Ibid., p. 117.

5 Heim, Jesus the World's Perfecter, p. 135.

Indeed, "a simple man has a vague feeling that these ingenious formulations take away from under his feet the only ground on which he is able to take up the burden of life every day."[1]

Heim feels that the search for a noble and satisfying meaning within the framework of the present polar world form is only an unsatisfactory repetition of the tragic mistake of Israel in identifying their ultimate hope with the Davidic Kingdom.[2] The most attractive present day form of the heresy appears in Marxism.[3] Such hopes are like a "piece of music with a lovely and promising beginning, which afterwards loses its charm and in the end relapses into the night of nothingness with a shrill discord."[4] There can, in fact, be no fulfilment in history. As if personal experience were not enough, the second law of thermodynamics makes this clear.[5] The Weltanschauung of the Bible is comprised in "the hope for a new heaven and a new earth."[6] Jesus is to be understood as the "world's perfecter" not by

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1 Ibid.
2 Heim, The World: Its Creation and Consummation, p. 110.
3 Ibid., p. 111.
4 Ibid., p. 129.
5 Ibid., p. 89.
6 Heim, Die Weltanschauung der Bibel (Leipzig, 1921), p. 70.

reference to some dogma of inevitable progress, but with an eye to his resurrection, and his deliverance of his own in the final consummation. Then, "the whole basic form of this world" will be "abolished to make way for a new form."[1] "The content of the world, like molten metal, will be poured into a new mould."[2] Death will be "swallowed up in victory."[3]

Heim is keenly aware of the difficulty which human thought and speech encounter when attempting to speak of the consummation. Our thought is "limited within the range of the polar world form," and therefore, "language cannot be expressed positively, but only negatively, although" it is concerned with "the most positive reality that there is."[4] With a boldness grounded in the New Testament, Heim does not hesitate to suggest an outline of what "the perfecting of the world" may involve: (1) "an end of the condition in which living forms of limited strength mutually dislodge and destroy one another....'Death shall be no more.'"

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1 Heim, The World: Its Creation and Consummation, p. 110.

2 Ibid., p. 113.

3 I Cor. 15:53. In philosophical-conceptual language, Heim speaks of these religious thoughts as deliverance from the curse of polarity into a supra-polar reality. See pp. 164 f. this paper.

4 Heim, The World: Its Creation and Consummation, p. 113.

(2) "Limitation of knowledge also ceases....The pure in heart...will see God." (3) "Suffering also will cease." Every tear will be wiped away. "There shall be no 'mourning no crying nor pain any more.'" (4) "The thirst for beauty will be satisfied," for God will himself become visible. Heim concludes this description by affirming that "the only positive thing we can say about it is what Paul sums up in the words: 'Then God will be all in all.'"[1] Man will encounter on his own, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him."[2]

This belief of the Christian Church in an ultimate fulfilment of personal life and history is not based on mere speculation or idle hope. Rather, it is grounded in the conviction and experience that in the "physical resurrection of Jesus Christ a cosmic event took place."[3] For those who know the resurrected Christ as their living Leader, the resurrection "is not merely a miracle which happened to a particular individual, but the beginning of a total transformation

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1 I Cor. 15:28, "everything to everyone," R.S.V. Heim, Jesus the World's Perfecter, pp. 195-197. The supra-polar reality.

2 I Cor. 2:9. Heim, The World: Its Creation and Consummation, p. 116.

3 Ibid., p. 133. Underlining mine.

of the whole cosmos."[1] This is the Easter faith of the New Testament, in which the resurrection of Jesus is understood as "the prelude or prologue to the new state of the world, which alone gives a final eternal meaning to our personal life and also to the life of the nations."[2]

Heim believes that the nature myths of paganism are not incidental to the matter under discussion. They are, in fact, an "expression of the unfulfilled longing that finds its" tentative fulfilment in the resurrection and its consummation in the eschaton.[3]

> If this victory has really been gained, then the Easter celebrated by the woods and the fields is in fact the first dawning light of the change in the world which will come when the shadow of the winter of death has withdrawn from creation. And this deep word is true: Natura spirat resurrectionem, nature breathes the resurrection.[4]

The idea of the participation of the whole of nature in the ultimate consummation is of outstanding importance in Heim's thought. Doubtless this is in part due to his studies in an appreciation of natural science. But it also has a deeply rooted Biblical

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1 Ibid., p. 137.
2 Ibid., p. 49. Underlining mine.
3 Heim, Jesus the World's Perfecter, p. 180.
4 Ibid., p. 181.

basis. "Paul can therefore speak...of a groaning of the whole creation crying out for deliverance from the bondage of corruption."[1] This deep appreciation for nature takes on a sacramental character:

> We cannot help thinking that the whole of reality around us is not simply an inanimate mass, but that there lies behind it something which presents an analogy, however distant, with what we call a Thou. This raises the ancient question...whether perhaps the whole world is animate.[2]

Not just animals but also plants,[3] are "our unknown brothers,"[4] and Heim believes it is a "naive piece of human arrogance" to exclude this possibility.[5] Along with us "the creation waits with eager longing" for the fulfilment of the meaning of its existence, the final consummation, when "God will be all in all."

VI

Heim's answer to the question of the meaning of life may be summarized in the following points:

I. The question may be answered in a preliminary and tentative way by pointing to the scientific fact of

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1 Heim, The World: Its Creation and Consummation, p. 109. Rom. 8:18-25. See also Isa. 11:6-9.
2 Heim, Christian Faith and Natural Science, p. 82.
3 Ibid., p. 88.
4 Ibid., p. 107.
5 Heim, The World: Its Creation and Consummation, p. 107.

of man's technical intelligence, which has its complement in the theological doctrine of "dominion" over the earth. Man is meant to be the "leader" within creation.

II. Any really satisfactory answer to the question, however, must first come to grips with the unhappy fact of man's sin and guilt. Man has forfeited the privilege of leadership through his sin, so that he is impotent to realize the meaning of his life. In honestly confronting his guilt man learns both the inevitability of the question of meaning and the impossibility of securing an answer by his own efforts.

III. The answer can only come to an individual in the form of a personal commission from God, who is the giver of meaning, and whom we encounter in Jesus Christ <u>our</u> Leader. Personal meaning enters a life when this personal God bestows a personal commission upon the individual. In response to this commission of Christ, the question of the meaning of life comes to rest.

IV. When this happens, we know we are not meant to

live unto ourselves, but, because we stand before God with others, we are meant to be responsible to one another.

V. The community of those individuals who live under the leadership of Christ constitute the church, which exists as an instrument of God's purpose in the world until the final consummation.

VI. That final consummation is the fact which determines everything else, for in it personal life, the whole of nature and history, will fulfill and secure their ultimate and eternal meaning.

VII. Meanwhile, man's task is not speculation about the consummation, but obedience to Christ his Leader. For in Him, man's search for meaning comes to rest. Indeed, the meaning of the creation is comprised in Christ, and is realised in following Him.

Heim's answer to the question of the meaning of life is both challenging and suggestive. It is free from the arbitrary, dogmatic propositions of Barth's theology, and is considerably more comprehensive than the intentionally fragmentary, existentialist theology of Bultmann. Heim's theology has the distinction that

it emerges from a serious wrestling with practically every issue of thought and experience confronting modern man.

> Karl Heim has never allowed his message to grow "irrelevant by anachronism." No new tendency in modern thought has developed...but that he has rushed at once to the spot, entered sympathetically into it, and then proceeded to show, by merciless analysis, how with all its merits it has failed to solve the ultimate human problem, to which only Christ has the answer.[1]

Whether or not Heim's (or any theologian's) answer to the question of the meaning of life "presents itself with the force of evidence"[2] is a matter which can not finally be decided apart from personal conviction. But, it can hardly be challenged that Heim's answer is unambiguously grounded in the New Testament, is comprehensive in the breadth to which it extends, and is totally "believable" in terms of modern thought.

Heim's answer to the question of the meaning of life is dominated by its eschatological orientation. Keenly sensitive to the history of the German nation in which he lived, Heim believed that there must be a final and total deliverance from the tragic

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1 Walter M. Horton, Contemporary Continental Theology (London: SCM Press, 1938), p. 128.

2 Heim's own description of "secularism." See p. 156 this paper.

sinfulness, the ambiguities, the "polarity" of this finite world "if everything is not to be utterly meaningless."[1]

> Only if the Church counts in quiet certitude and without any psychological excitement on the coming of the Kingdom of God "in power" as an event that is at hand can she bear the present condition of the world without going to pieces on account of it.[2]

Like the Revelation of St. John, Heim tends to interpret the meaning of life in terms of Die Hoffnung auf einem neuen Himmel und eine neue Erde, the hope for a new heaven and a new earth. In 1938 Walter M. Horton rightly noted that "Heim's writing has what Otto would call a 'numinous' quality about it, impossible to convey in a brief outline. To read his... two books in German [Jesus the Lord and Jesus the World's Perfecter] is like living through the Apocalypse."[3]

Considered in its historical context, Heim's eschatological emphasis must have had considerable pastoral and theological significance. It must, indeed, have been difficult for a Christian to find anything meaningful in the immediate historical

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1 Heim, p. 189 this paper.
2 Heim, Jesus the World's Perfecter, p. 209.
3 Horton, Contemporary Continental Theology, p. 134.

context of the Third Reich. Meaning could only be found in a hope for deliverance.

It would be a most unfortunate mistake to suppose that our position today is so different as to render Heim's eschatological orientation irrelevant. But, it is perhaps true that our position today is different enough to see that there is more to be explored than eschatology. It is to Heim's lasting credit that he also saw this fact, though he was unable to develop it. Heim is actually able to enter into a more daring description of what may be involved in the supraspolar, eschatological consummation than he is able to envision what God's will for the concrete present may involve. This is reasonably easy to understand in its historical context, but is lacking in helpful suggestions for those seeking an understanding of their present experiences, and the relationship of these experiences to that eschatological goal.

Heim's position on this matter has a certain similarity to Bultmann's in that he recognizes that man's perspective is highly limited and conditioned by his historicity, and that in himself he "can only guess at the ultimate meaning of [the]

fundamental order."[1] But Heim's position is immediately different from Bultmann's in that he is certain that there is a fundamental order as well as goal for nature and history, and therefore for man. Heim is certain that human life in history has a meaning. But, he has more of an idea of what the world process will ultimately lead to than what the process is involved with now. His thought neglects a constructive analysis of what man's present life in nature and history may mean, apart from the observation that it is the time of the calling of the church.[2] His unquestionably profound studies of nature and history have not led him to propose an answer to the question of the meaning of the present.

But, his neglect on this matter is not a total one. Two points should be noted. The first is what may be called Heim's "personalism." The second is the presence of rudimentary but undeveloped suggestions already present in Heim's thought which, if

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1 Heim, Jesus the World's Perfecter, p. 223.

2 It just may be that, in spite of his brilliant criticisms of Oswald Spengler, Heim has, at this point, accepted too many of Spengler's premises. See "Die Religiöse Bedeutung des Schicksalsgedankens bei Oswald Spengler," in Glaube und Leben, pp. 374-405. For a discussion of Heim's thoughts on history see Dickie, Revelation and Response, particularly p. 209.

enlarged, could strengthen his theology in this area.

As already indicated, Heim believes that there is meaning in the fundamental order of nature and history. He believes that man realizes his part in this fundamental order as he follows Christ. At this point Heim's thought is radically Christocentric, and radically personalistic. He will not permit any principle to be concluded from the New Testament so as to serve as a guide in interpreting the present. For, he is suspicious that every such principle leads to the abandonment of the Living Leader in favor of a program. Only the contemporary Christ "can really reveal to us the meaning of creation in every new situation."[1] We can only avoid misinterpretation as we abandon attempts at interpretation in favor of concrete obedience to the person of our Living Lord. The Christian is therefore to be understood not as a "pupil" or an "adherent" but as "part of the extended personality of Christ."[2]

Heim, thus, gives no answer to the question of the meaning of this life, but only a promise that it will ultimately prove to have been meaningful, and advice as to how to deal with the experiential

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1 Heim, Jesus the World's Perfecter, p. 228.
2 Ibid., p. 219.

problem of meaninglessness for the present. He suggests that in the context of the I-Thou, follower-Leader, relationship, the question "comes to rest," "without reflexion."[1] But does it? This answer seems to suggest that God's purpose for human life is to have people who will follow Christ and obey Him, and who have been promised an ultimate fulfilment, but who are requested to please not ask questions about the significance of their own contribution while they live. It is just this question, however, which is at stake in a theological inquiry into the meaning of life, and particularly when the structure of thought is determined by a futuristic eschatology.

At this point a simple but important distinction should be noted. The existential problem of meaninglessness may very well come to rest as a man, with a mind to true discipleship, follows Christ. But, this is a different thing from the question coming to rest. The disciple is not a man who lives "without reflexion," and no better example need be found to prove this than Heim himself. The admonition to follow Jesus is certainly pastorally prior to any intellectual formulations

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1 See p. 176 this paper.

of what this may involve, but discipleship does not cancel the searching of the intellect for understanding.

It is probably true that the way in which the question is asked, the form which it takes, is considerably changed when asked in the context of discipleship. Fear and anxiety, implicit in the question outside the context of discipleship, may be replaced by a more serene search for an understanding of the meaning of discipleship. Man's intellectual searching may now be a part of the quest to be a better disciple. The question may be thus substantially changed, but the question remains. The existential problem of meaninglessness may be solved in following Christ, but the question of meaning is not thereby put to rest.

As already indicated, Heim's theology actually contains several thoughts which, if enlarged, could develop into an adequate understanding of the meaning of man's present life. These are: (1) Heim suggests that man's technical intelligence is his created equipment for extending the "leadership" principle into the world. It is a strange thing that this significant theme, once introduced, is

never more than introduced. It is full of possibilities for development. (2) To "follow" Jesus is certainly to be personally related to him. But, it is also certain that in the New Testament this relationship has some structure to it recognizable in such ideas as the "servant theme" (easily related to the leadership principle), and the "love commandment." There is something tantalizing about Heim's brief reference to the church as the extended personality of Christ. But Heim leaves undeveloped what this means in the structure of human personality, society and history. Without some structure, however, it is impossible to recognize the leadership of Jesus as the leadership of Jesus. (3)Heim, like Bultmann, does not sufficiently develop what he means by "responsibility," though he has the vision to see that without this responsibility to the present our

future eschatology is an "illusion."[1] (4) Finally, Heim could have developed his eschatological vision so that in addition to being a source of hope it would also be a clue to action in the present, and therefore to the meaning of the present. His fear of faith becoming a mere "program" should thus be balanced by fear of suggesting that the present is characterized by anarchy - a conclusion Heim would not wish to draw. Far from deserting his eschatology, his eschatology could thus serve him better.

All four of these points indicate that Heim's thought is not structurally opposed to the question of the meaning of life in the present, but rather

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1 Heim, Jesus the World's Perfecter, p. 180. See also his essay on responsibility and destiny in Germany's New Religion, pp. 87-113. Edgar P. Dickie, in 1928, anticipated the criticisms in points 2 and 3 by noting Heim's emphasis upon the individual standing alone before God, and his failure to understand the church as a responsible community. "Heim's doctrine of the Church can indicate...only the sense of a common faith, and a similar saving experience. He has no place for the thought that its members have Divine responsibilities for one another and for the world outside; nor for the thought that there are consequences of sin that the Church can bear. He says, for example, that Church and mission cannot stop the causes of war; they can only build an ark where we can hide....It is on this conviction, of the utter loneliness of the soul with God, that Heim's doctrine of the Church must founder." "Leaders of Theological Thought - Karl Heim," The Expository Times, XXXIX, (Jan. 1928), pp. 153, 154.

that it is potentially alive with an answer which is undeveloped. It is unfortunate, therefore, that every time Heim seems about to say something concrete about the meaning of the present, he either stops altogether, or shifts to future eschatology. The considerable contribution of Heim's thought, however, should not be judged by its weakness in one area, and the strength of his apologetic theology is given proper perspective in the recent tribute of Walter M. Horton:

> The most thoroughgoing attempt in our time to correlate and reconcile the scientific and religious world pictures has been made by the dean of German Protestant theologians, Karl Heim.[1]

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1 Walter M. Horton, Christian Theology: An Ecumenical Approach, (London: Lutterworth Press, 1956) p. 130.

CHAPTER V

The Meaning of Life

in the

Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr

I

The most striking fact about Reinhold Niebuhr is the impact he has had upon social, economic and political thought in the United States. The importance of this impact must be understood not only in terms of its penetrating depth, but also in terms of its encompassing breadth which extends considerably beyond the boundaries of the Protestant church. Thus, Rabbi Abraham I. Heschel of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America observes: "The degree to which Neibuhr does influence American thinking is one of the most significant facts of contemporary American history."[1] Similar conclusions have been reached by a most impressive array of authorities. The Harvard historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. says: "No man has had as much influence as a preacher in this generation; no preacher has had as much

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1 "A Hebrew Evaluation of Reinhold Niebuhr," Reinhold Niebuhr: His Religious, Social, and Political Thought, ed. by Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961), p. 392.

influence in the secular world."[1] This "influence in the secular world" receives its most obvious expression in the broad area of politics. Thus, political philosopher Hans J. Morgenthau says: "I have always considered Reinhold Niebuhr the greatest living political philosopher of America, perhaps the only creative political philosopher since Calhoun."[2] And George Kennan, former United States Ambassador to the Soviet Union, confesses: "Niebuhr is the father of us all."[3] Probably, however, the greatest evidence of Niebuhr's influence is not what is said about him by any particular authority, but the extent to which he is himself quoted as an authority (generally without page reference) by the American press and such widely read

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1 "Reinhold Niebuhr's Role in American Political Thought and Life," Ibid., p. 149.

2 "The Influence of Reinhold Niebuhr in American Political Life and Thought," Reinhold Niebuhr: A Prophetic Voice in Our Time, ed. by Harold R. Landon (Greenwich, Conn.: The Seabury Press, 1962), p. 109.

3 As quoted in June Bingham, Courage to Change: An Introduction to the Life and Thought of Reinhold Niebuhr (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), p. 368.

journals as Time and Newsweek.[1]

Niebuhr confesses to be embarrassed by the title "theologian." He claims to have neither competence nor interest in the "nice points of pure theology."[2] Rather, he is at home in the more practical field of Christian social ethics in which he has undertaken to "clarify the insights and resources of Christian faith in such a way that they may be savingly related to the structures, dynamics, and decisions of large social groups."[3] His profound analysis of the human situation has called forth the peculiar title of "anthropologian,"[4] which, if not satisfactory, is at least suggestive. Niebuhr himself writes: "When I was invited to give the Gifford Lectures in 1939...

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1 Among those who, in 1960, contributed toward establishing a chair in Social Ethics at Union Seminary, named in honor of Niebuhr, are: W.H. Auden, John Baillie, Chester Bowles, Emil Brunner, Ralph J. Bunche, C.H. Dodd, T.S. Eliot, Harry Emerson Fosdick, Will Herberg, Sir Hector Hetherington, William E. Hocking, Douglas Horton, Hubert H. Humphrey, George F. Kennan, Walter Lippmann, Henry R. Luce, Charles Malik, Jacques Maritain, Robert Oppenheimer, G. Bromley Oxnam, Alan Paton, Walter Reuther, Eleanor Roosevelt, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., Charles Scribner, Jr., George N. Shuster, Lord Stansgate, Adlai E. Stevenson, Norman Thomas, Paul Tillich, Arnold Toynbee, W.A. Visser't Hooft.

2 "Intellectual Autobiography of Reinhold Niebuhr," Kegley and Bretall, op. cit., p. 3.

3 Gordon Harland, The Thought of Reinhold Niebuhr (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. vii.

4 Ibid., p. 13.

I chose the only subject which I could have chosen... 'The Nature and Destiny of Man.'"[1]

Nevertheless, Niebuhr is, and is universally recognized as, one of Protestantism's leading theologians - probably the greatest which America has produced. In a penetrating study Gordon Harland concludes that Niebuhr's thought "is in direct line with that of the Great Reformers."[2] Although his theology is sometimes associated with continental neo-orthodoxy, Niebuhr's own term "Christian Realism" is considerably more descriptive.[3] This character of "realism" emerges from Niebuhr's tireless endeavor to apply the insights of Christian faith "to the experiences of life from top to bottom."[4] His is not an "ivory tower" theology, but one whose achievements make the

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1 "Intellectual Autobiography of Reinhold Niebuhr," Kegley and Bretall, op. cit., p. 9.

2 Harland, op. cit., p. viii.

3 Niebuhr writes that "Brunner's whole theological position is close to mine and...it is one to which I am more indebted than any other." (Kegley and Bretall, op. cit., p. 431.) But, with obvious reference to Barth, Niebuhr writes, "When I find neo-orthodoxy turning into sterile orthodoxy or a new Scholasticism, I find that I am a liberal at heart...."(Quoted from the Christian Century article "How My Mind has Changed" in Bingham, op. cit., p. 342.)

4 Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), II, 204.

term "relevant" seem only mildly descriptive.[1]

Before considering the question of the meaning of life in Niebuhr's thought, it will be helpful to examine the general theological framework from which his answer emerges. Brief consideration will be given to (1) his epistemology; (2) his doctrine of man, including man's involvement in sin; and (3) his basic approach to ethics.

Paul Tillich observes that Niebuhr does not, in fact, have an epistemology. "Niebuhr does not ask, 'How can I know?'; he starts knowing. And he does not ask afterward, 'How could I know?', but leaves the convincing power of his thought without epistemological support."[2] This observation, so neatly summarized by Tillich, should not be looked at as a methodological oversight by Niebuhr, but rather, as a clear perception of his intention. For, Niebuhr consciously begins with the presuppositions of Christian faith, and proceeds under the conviction

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1 George Harland writes that "if one word had to be chosen to indicate the character of Niebuhr's work and achievement, that word would have to be 'relevance.'" (op. cit., p. 21.) Similarly, Paul Tillich comments that if anyone was en kairo in the United States during the thirties, "it was Niebuhr." (Landon, op. cit., p. 51.)

2 "Reinhold Niebuhr's Doctrine of Knowledge," Kegley and Bretall, op. cit., p. 36.

that "once faith is induced it becomes truly the wisdom which makes 'sense' out of a life and history which would otherwise remain senseless."[1] Of course, this does not, for Niebuhr, mean Biblical literalism. "It is important to take Biblical symbols seriously but not literally."[2] Nor does it mean any suspension of the critical faculties. For critical observation discovers that "all the known facts of history verify the interpretation of human destiny implied in [the] New Testament."[3] What it does mean is that, unlike both classical and modern views of man, Biblical faith demonstrates an "'empirical' superiority in comprehending facts which cannot be brought into logical coherence."[4] There are simply times when "loyalty to all the facts may require a provisional defiance of logic, lest complexity in the facts of experience be denied for the sake of

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1 Niebuhr, op. cit., II, 206.
2 Ibid., p. 50.
3 Ibid., p. 319.
4 Reinhold Niebuhr, The Self and the Dramas of History (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1956), p. 255.

a premature logical consistency."[1]

This insistence upon the "empirical superiority" of Biblical faith is the key to understanding Niebuhr's approach to theology. He believes that "we are confronted with evidence that the thesis of Biblical faith...is more valid than the alternative theses which find much greater favour among the sophisticated."[2] Not logical consistencies,[3] but "common human experience can validate it."[4]

In a discussion on the theological quest for pure doctrine, Niebuhr writes that "loyalty to the truth requires confidence in the possibility of its attainment; toleration of others requires broken

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1 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, I, 263. Niebuhr observes that Amos "makes nonsense of the claims of the rationalists that only reason is able to emancipate men of excessive devotion to the parochial and the partial." (Ibid., p. 215.) "Reason itself is not the source of law, since it is not possible to prove the self's obligation to the neighbour by any rational analysis which does not assume the proposition it intends to prove." (Reinhold Niebuhr, Faith and History: A Comparison of Christian and Modern Views of History (London: Nisbet & Co., 1949), p. 219.)

2 Niebuhr, The Self and the Dramas of History, p. 83.

3 June Bingham observes that Niebuhr is "forever at war with oversimplification." (Op. cit., p. 33.) Niebuhr notes: "Modern man...is characterized by his simple certainties about himself." (Nature and Destiny of Man, I, 4.) But, "Man is more than reason; that is why his actions are usually less than reasonable." (Christianity and Society, Spring, 1939, as quoted in Bingham, op. cit., p. 234.)

4 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, I, 143.

confidence in the finality of our own truth."[1] Thus, he is led to speak of "having, and not having the truth"[2] - a significant concept which he understands as implied in the Reformation, but quickly lost in the heat of controversy. The Reformers unfortunately "gave little indication of any consciousness that error might be mixed with the truth which [they] possessed; though the truth which [they] possessed contained the recognition of this very paradox."[3] Theology must, therefore, continually be reminded that "the truth, as it is contained in the Christian revelation, included the recognition that it is neither possible for man to know the truth fully nor to avoid the error of pretending that he does."[4] Consequently,

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1 Ibid., II, 243.
2 Ibid., chap. VIII.
3 Ibid., p. 223. See also I, 202 where Niebuhr observes that "the greatest teachers of [the] Reformation doctrine of the sinfulness of all men used it on occasion as the instrument of an arrogant will-to-power against theological opponents." Then, with regard to Karl Barth's Nein to Emil Brunner's Nature and Grace, Niebuhr observes that Barth's answer "is informed by a peculiar quality of personal arrogance and disrespect for the opponent." Niebuhr is aware that "it is not possible to escape this error completely. But it is possible to have...a theology, grounded in faith, which understands that the error will be committed and that it is analogous to all those presumptions of history which defy the majesty of God." (II, 167.)
4 Ibid., p. 217. Niebuhr acknowledges his indebtedness to Tillich. See pp. 217, 218, 226. Note also p. 371 this paper.

Niebuhr wishes to take up the theological task only after a warning to himself to proceed with humility and caution. "Every truth can be made the servant of sinful arrogance, including the prophetic truth that all men fall short of the truth."[1]

With this warning before him, Niebuhr lists what he considers to be three aspects of general revelation: (1) The first is the universal awareness of "being confronted with a 'wholly other' at the edge of human consciousness."[2] This awareness is experienced as "the testimony in the consciousness of every person that his life touches a reality beyond himself, a reality deeper and higher than the system of nature in which he stands."[3] As such it is "not so much a separate experience, as an overtone implied in all experience."[4] (2) Secondly, there is "the sense of moral obligation laid upon one from beyond oneself and of moral unworthiness before a judge."[5] This is implied in the uncomfortable experience of every man that he is "being seen, commanded, judged and known from beyond" himself.[6] (3) The two previous

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1 Ibid., I, 127.
2 Ibid., p. 131.
3 Ibid., p. 127.
4 Ibid. Niebuhr appeals here to Romans 1.
5 Ibid., p. 131.
6 Ibid., p. 123.

aspects of general revelation are, according to Niebuhr, "not too sharply defined" in human experience. The third "is not defined at all."[1] It is experienced more as a not-having than as a having of revelation. It is the "longing for forgiveness."[2]

These three aspects of the universally human situation receive their complement in Christian faith when God is known as Creator, Judge and Redeemer.[3] The "special" revelation which Christian faith finds in Christ receives its significance in that it *completes* what is incomplete, *clarifies* what is obscure, and *corrects* the false interpretations of the meaning of life which inevitably arise from general revelation alone.[4]

It is important to understand, however, that when Niebuhr speaks of general *or* special revelation he is not thinking of something which is "essentially miraculous."[5] Rather, he is thinking of "an historical event or series of events...which are discerned by faith to have revelatory power into" the mysterious

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1 Ibid., p. 131.
2 Ibid. Underlining mine.
3 Ibid., p. 132.
4 Ibid., II, 67.
5 Niebuhr, The Self and the Dramas of History, p. 73.

and characteristically human aspects of life.[1] Jesus Christ does not introduce an external truth into the human situation but makes manifest an inner truth which is always already there. He "does not superimpose, but merely clarifies, the truth about man's situation...which is given by the very constitution of selfhood."[2]

In developing his understanding of "the nature and destiny of man," Niebuhr acknowledges "the obvious fact...that man is a child of nature, subject to its vicissitudes, compelled by its necessities, driven by its impulses, and confined within the brevity of the years which nature permits its varied organic forms, allowing them some, but not too much, latitude."[3] It is therefore necessary to recognize that "man's finite existence in the body and in history can be essentially affirmed, as naturalism wants to affirm it."[4] Man is to be understood as "a creature imbedded in the natural order."[5] This fact becomes determinative for his existence as a man because

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1 Ibid.
2 Ibid., p. 249.
3 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, I, 3.
4 Ibid., p. 15.
5 Ibid., p. 270.

"the basis of selfhood lies in the particularity of the body."[1] But this is not the only fact necessary to an understanding of man, and taken by itself it can only lead to a misunderstanding.

The second, less obvious but equally important fact to note is that "man is a spirit who stands outside of nature, life, himself, his reason and the world."[2] By "spirit," Niebuhr refers to man's capacity for transcending himself and his world, "the ability to make himself his own object" and to stand over against natural process.[3] Niebuhr is aware that certain schools of modern thought attempt to ignore or discard this spiritual aspect of man. But, he believes that the very fact that man "can set time, nature, the world and being per se into juxtaposition to himself and inquire after the meaning of these things, proves that in some sense he stands

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1 Ibid., p. 54.
2 Ibid., p. 3.
3 Ibid., pp. 4 f. "The human mind transcends itself in infinite regression, and human reason is able to contemplate the fact of human reason." (Ibid., II, 12.) Niebuhr speaks of his "indebtedness to the great Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber, whose book I and Thou first instructed me and many others on the uniqueness of human selfhood and on the religious dimension of the problem." (The Self and the Dramas of History, p. 11.)

outside and beyond them."[1] And again, "a life which knows the flux in which it stands cannot be completely a part of that flux."[2]

This fact of man's transcendent existence as spirit gives him the possibility not only of knowing, but also of affecting the natural process in which he stands. It is the basis of his freedom; and is, in a sense, identical with his freedom.[3] The spiritual character of man's finite creaturely life means that he "is free enough to violate both the necessities of nature and the logical systems of reason."[4] Of course, this freedom which is grounded in man's existence as spirit is in turn grounded in man's existence as creature, and is thereby subject to creaturely limitations.[5] But this fact of freedom is an absolutely critical aspect of the essential nature of man.[6]

After acknowledging that man is creature, and therefore subject to the limitations of creatureliness, and that he is spirit, and therefore is free

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1 Ibid., p. 124. Underlining mine.
2 Reinhold Niebuhr, Beyond Tragedy: Essays on the Christian Interpretation of History (London: Nisbet and Co. Ltd., 1938), p. 297.
3 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, I, 55.
4 Ibid., p. 124.
5 Ibid., pp. 27, 56.
6 Ibid., p. 17.

within limits to transcend his creaturelines, it is necessary to recognise a third characteristic of the nature of man. It is a characteristic concerning which Biblical faith is in violent disagreement with both naturalistic and rationalistic interpretations. The point which must be grasped is that both classical and modern attempts by man to understand himself either in terms of his relation to nature or in terms of his rational capacities inevitably lead to a denial of what is essentially human. "Man stands too completely outside of both nature and reason to understand himself in terms of either without misunderstanding himself."[1] The transcendent self "which stands outside itself and the world cannot find the meaning of life in itself or the world."[2] It is necessary to point to the deep and abiding truth contained in the Biblical expression "image of God." Man can only understand himself aright as one who is already understood from beyond himself. He can, therefore, only be truly

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1 Ibid., p. 15. Sufficient evidence that man can not be understood in terms of reason is given by the fact that the self can "use" reason to justify itself to itself and to others - a most unreasonable thing for it to do. See The Self and the Dramas of History, Chapter 4.

2 Ibid., p. 15.

understood in terms of his relationship to God.[1] For man "to understand himself truly means to begin with a faith that he is understood from beyond himself, that he is known and loved of God and must find himself in terms of obedience to the divine will."[2] Man, as transcendent spirit, does not know what to do with his freedom, and can only find himself in terms which are ultimately beyond himself - as a child of God.

Niebuhr believes that "any astute analysis of the human situation must lead" to the three conclusions listed above."[3] It is, however, in Jesus Christ that these three preliminary conclusions become completed and clarified and that misleading interpretations are corrected. For, in Christ we see the fulness of "the truth about man's situation ...which is given by the very constitution of

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1 Ibid., pp. 13, 15.

2 Ibid., p. 15. Niebuhr finds the charge that man has created God in his own image to be absurd. "The real situation is that man who is made in the image of God is unable, precisely because of those qualities in him which are designated as 'image of God,' to be satisfied with a god who is made in man's image. By virtue of his capacity for self-transcendence he can look beyond himself sufficiently to know that a projection of himself is not God." (Ibid., p. 166.)

3 Ibid.

selfhood."[1] And, we also see the truth about God, who is "the structure, the law, the essential character of reality,...the source and center of the created world."[2] The same Christ who makes manifest the true nature of man also reveals the true nature of God. "Christ has this twofold significance because <u>love</u> has this double significance."[3] Love is the essential law of human life, and God is love.[4]

The love commandment confronts mankind with the ultimate "vision of health." It can only be recognized as defining man's essential nature, his <u>justitia originalis</u>. But, the fact that it confronts man as a commandment, as law, points to the unhappy truth that this vision of health is not, in fact, man's possession. Rather, it is "the original righteousness which man does not possess but which he knows he ought to possess."[5] The ultimate vision of health revealed in Christ's love commandment stands in "paradoxical juxtaposition" to the reality of the human situation, and the law of love points

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1 Niebuhr, <u>The Self and the Dramas of History</u>, p. 249.
2 Niebuhr, <u>The Nature and Destiny of Man</u>, I, 141.
3 <u>Ibid</u>., p. 146.
4 I John 4:16.
5 Niebuhr, <u>The Nature and Destiny of Man</u>, I, 287.

to the lawlessness of sin.[1]

In attempting to grasp Niebuhr's understanding of sin it is important to note that his thought is not determined by the Genesis story about the fall of Adam. He believes that the popular modern notion that sin "can be dismissed by anyone who does not find this primitive account credible" to be itself "absurd."[2] Conviction concerning the universal reality of sin is in no sense dependent upon the credibility of these passages. Rather, "the estimate is supported by overwhelming evidence taken both from a sober observation of human behavior and from introspective analysis."[3] The facts of life and history forbid our granting to sin the "prestige of normality," though just such a claim by sin is inevitable. "Every effort to give the habits of sin the appearance of normality betrays something of the frenzy of an uneasy conscience."[4]

The fact that man is not only a child of nature, but that he also transcends nature, that he is free

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1 Ibid., p. 15.
2 Kegley and Bretall, op. cit., p. 11.
3 Ibid.
4 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, I, 265, 266.

spirit, is basic for any adequate understanding of sin. For, it is precisely this freedom to stand outside one's self, history and nature which both becomes the basis of human creativity[1] and which "tempts man to megalomania."[2] Man's capacity to make himself his own object reveals to him his own finiteness, dependence and weakness. "The Biblical view is that the finiteness, dependence and the insufficiency of man's mortal life are facts which belong to God's plan of creation and must be accepted with reverence and humility."[3] In themselves they are good. But man, aware of his creaturely limitations, becomes anxious concerning them. It is "not his finiteness, dependence and weakness but his anxiety about it which tempts him to sin."[4] Anxiety appears as "the inevitable spiritual state of man, standing in the paradoxical situation of freedom and finiteness."[5] The situation is such that the human "self lacks the faith and the trust to subject itself to God. It seeks to establish itself independently. It seeks to find its life and thereby

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1 Ibid., p. 183.
2 Ibid., p. 124.
3 Ibid., p. 167.
4 Ibid., p. 163. Underlining mine.
5 Ibid., p. 182.

loses it."[1] Man attempts to protect himself against his finitude with the result that he violates his finitude by overstepping "the limits which God has set for him."[2] The result is that "all human life is involved in the sin of seeking security at the expense of other life. The perils of nature are thereby transmuted into the more grievous perils of human history."[3]

Niebuhr lists three ways in which man seeks to hide his finitude. All three manifest themselves in

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1 Ibid., p. 252.

2 Ibid., pp. 181, 182. Niebuhr believes there are actually two abortive solutions to the paradoxical problem presented by man's freedom and finiteness. The first of these is the above mentioned attempt by man to hide his finitude. It consequently exhibits itself in some absurd form of pride. The second is the attempt by man to hide his freedom; it exhibits itself in sensuality. (Ibid., p. 179.) Virtually the whole of Niebuhr's attention is concerned with the former. The "more apparent and discernible" sins of sensuality are, Niebuhr believes, closer to personal "anarchy than selfishness." (Ibid., p. 223.) He concludes his brief consideration of sensuality with the following summary:

> Sensuality is always: (1) an extension of self-love to the point where it defeats its own ends; (2) an effort to escape the prison house of self by finding a god in a process or person outside the self; and (3) finally an effort to escape from the confusion which sin has created into some form of subconscious existence. (Ibid., p. 240.)

3 Ibid., p. 182. The similarity of this thought to Karl Heim's "polarity" is obvious. See p. 164 this paper.

some form of pride. The first of these is the pride of power. It becomes manifest in the demonic desire to control and dominate others, and in the exploitation of nature. For this form of pride such words as "self-sufficiency" or "self-mastery" are important. It is characterized by the assumption that it is the "author of its own existence, the judge of its own values and the master of its own destiny."[1] It is particularly the temptation of the wealthy.[2] The second is the pride of knowledge. In this case "man is afraid to face the problem of his limited knowledge lest he fall into the abyss of meaninglessness."[3] He therefore attempts to complete the system of meaning prematurely, and with a "claim of finality."[4] It is particularly likely to be apparent in the lives of the educated, among whom "knowledge draws the fangs of self-

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1 Ibid., p. 188.

2 Niebuhr believes that "socio-economic conditions actually determine to a large degree that some men are tempted to pride and injustice, while others are encouraged to humility." (Ibid., p. 225.)

3 Ibid., p. 185. It will, of course, be necessary to return to this particular consideration later.

4 Ibid., II, 167.

righteousness."[1] The third form is pride of virtue. The classic example looks back to the pharisees of Jesus' day, but the modern world abounds in contemporary illustrations of the fact that it is impossible for man either to fulfill the meaning of his life or to avoid the pretension of claiming that he has done so.[2] "Moral pride is the pretension of finite man that his highly conditioned virtue is the final righteousness and that his very relative moral standards are absolute."[3] For, "man cannot love himself inordinately without pretending that it is not his, but a universal, interest which he is supporting."[4] The inevitable result is the tendency to describe all alternative or non-conforming positions as essentially evil.[5] "Moral pride thus

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1 Reinhold Niebuhr, The Godly and the Ungodly: Essays on the Religious and Secular Dimensions of Modern Life (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1953), p. 143.

2 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, II, 98.

3 Ibid., I, 190.

4 Ibid., p. 253.

5 However, on the very grounds of moral pride Niebuhr rejects the classical statement of total depravity. "Man loves himself inordinately.... It is obviously necessary to practice some deception in order to justify such excessive devotion....The fact that this necessity exists is an important indication of the vestige of truth which abides with the self in all its confusion....The dishonesty of man is thus an interesting refutation of the doctrine of man's total depravity." (Ibid., p. 203.)

makes virtue the very vehicle of sin." This is the tragic "secret of the relationship between cruelty and self-righteousness."[1]

Over against this moral or spiritual pride, Biblical religion "is grounded in the faith that God speaks to man from beyond the highest pinnacle of the human spirit; and that this voice of God will discover man's highest not only to be short of the highest but involved in the dishonesty of claiming that it is the highest."[2]

The tragic predicament of sin is one which renders the human self "impotent to conform its actions to the requirements of its essential being."[3] According to the law of his being, man can only fulfill the meaning of his life "in loving relation to his fellows."[4] But in the very act of seeking such fulfilment he turns his love toward himself and thus betrays himself. It is not necessary, but it is inevitable. This contradiction exhibits itself in every level of his life.[5]

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1 Ibid., p. 199.
2 Ibid., p. 203.
3 Ibid., II, 108.
4 Ibid.
5 Niebuhr notes that "man is the kind of lion who both kills the lamb and also dreams of the day when the lion and lamb shall lie down together." Bingham, op. cit., p. 67.

This "curious predicament" of sin is one which man is never able to totally escape. This is true "even on the level of the new life."[1] There is always latent within man's existence a "continued incompleteness and a certain persistence of the strategy of sin."[2] Nothing more is needed or can be wanted than the "sorry annals of Christian fanaticism" to indicate that God's grace does not "remove the final contradiction between man and God."[3] Niebuhr believes that the "very burden of the Pauline message is that there is no peace in our own righteousness."[4] "For this reason the peace which follows conversion is never purely the contentment of achievement. It is always, in part, the peace which comes from the knowledge of forgiveness."[5]

Previous mention has been made of the fact that Niebuhr speaks of Jesus Christ as clarifying "the truth about man's situation...which is given by the very constitution of selfhood."[6] The "law of love,"

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1 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, II, 123.
2 Ibid., p. 100.
3 Ibid., p. 122.
4 Ibid., p. 103.
5 Ibid., p. 100.
6 Niebuhr, The Self and the Dramas of History, p. 249.

expressed specifically in the twofold commandment to love God and our neighbor, and manifest in the life and death of Jesus, comprises the essential law of human life and nature. This law is "immanent in life as God is immanent in the world."[1]

Most Christian ethical systems recognize this fundamental importance of Jesus' love commandment. The point at which Niebuhr's thought on the matter becomes creatively daring is in his recognition that this same law of love also "transcends the possibilities of human life in its final pinnacle as God transcends the world."[2] The fact is that "the love commandment is...no simple historical possibility."[3] Niebuhr comments wryly that "the modern pulpit would be saved from much sentimentality if the thousands of sermons which are annually preached upon these texts would contain some suggestions of the impossibility of these ethical demands for natural man in his immediate situations."[4] What is more, much of "modern" Christianity has been conspicuously "wrong...in presenting this ethic as one which might,

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1 Reinhold Niebuhr, An Interpretation of Christian Ethics (Harper & Brothers Publishers: New York, 1935), p. 37.

2 Ibid.

3 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, II, 247.

4 Niebuhr, An Interpretation of Christian Ethics, p. 46.

if generally practiced, become successful in history."[1] The simple facts of the matter are that "the ethic of Jesus does not deal at all with the immediate moral problem of every human life - the problem of arranging some kind of armistice between the various contending factions and forces. It has nothing to say about the relativities of politics and economics, nor of the...necessary prudent defenses of the self, required because of the egoism of others."[2] Those who think that the law of love is a simple possibility for man do not understand that "the law of love stands on the edge of history and not in history," and consequently that "it represents an ultimate and not an immediate possibility."[3] There is simply "no advice" from Jesus on "how we may hold the world of sin in check until the coming of the Kingdom of God." Consequently, no "social ethic can be directly derived from" it.[4] Jesus "demands an absolute obedience to the will of God without consideration of those consequences...which must be the

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1 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, II, 72.
2 Niebuhr, An Interpretation of Christian Ethics, p. 39.
3 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, I, 298.
4 Niebuhr, An Interpretation of Christian Ethics, p. 51.

concern of any prudential ethic."[1] Thus, for Niebuhr, not just the love commandment, but also the Christian doctrine of sin is fundamental to the development of an adequate approach to ethics.

Niebuhr states categorically that he does "not regard it as a 'tragedy that this love won't work.'"[2] Instead, he is impressed by the "relevance of an impossible ethical ideal." An ethical demand that "worked" could hardly stand over man in judgement, or call him to live beyond his own accomplishments. It is therefore far better to have an ethical imperative based in an order of reality which transcends human possibilities.[3] "No proximate law, but only an ultimate law...can be normative for man."[4]

This word "proximate" is important, even determinative, for understanding Niebuhr's ethics. For, since it is not a simple possibility to obey the absolute demand of sacrificial love within the relativities of history, it is necessary to look toward its partial or "proximate" realization. "The ultimate dimension of the ethical life must be

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1 Ibid., p. 82.
2 Quoted from the Christian Century in Harland, op. cit., p. 5.
3 Niebuhr, An Interpretation of Christian Ethics, p. 55.
4 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, II, 40.

related to...proximate ends."[1] Christian ethics must be willing to deal with the "'nicely calculated less and more' of justice and goodness."[2] "The difference between a little more and a little less justice in a social system and between a little more and a little less selfishness in the individual may represent differences between sickness and health, between misery and happiness in particular situations."[3]

When the Christian ideal of agape receives its partial and fragmentary realization in social life and history, it is called justice. Justice remains forever different from love, for "Agape is transcendent, heedless, and sacrificial," whereas justice

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1 Niebuhr, The Self and the Dramas of History, p. 251.

2 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, I, 229.

3 Ibid. Thus, Niebuhr supports democracy as "a method of finding proximate solutions for insoluble problems." (The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness, London: Nisbet and Co., Ltd., 1945, p. 83.) The sinful nature of man renders an ideal community of love impossible. The moral ambiguities of the individual's life merely become compounded in the larger social order, creating the necessity for some sort of "equilibrium of power," lest the strong dominate the weak. "It is the highest achievement of democratic societies that they" have had "some comprehension" of this problem and so "embody the principle of resistance to government within the principle of government itself." Thus, "criticism...becomes an instrument of better government and not a threat" to it. (The Nature and Destiny of Man, II, 268.) Niebuhr concludes that "man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary." (The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness, p. vi.)

is historical, discriminating, and concerned with balancing interests and claims."[1] Niebuhr does not by this mean that "justice" is mere "equality before the law." Justice, for him, may mean defying the law. It involves "the calculation of rights" and "taking sides for the weak against the strong."[2] Its character can never be once for all stated in legalistic or codified terms, even though it is always necessary within the structures of society to create laws in order to achieve justice. But justice may never be equated with law, for law may, on any particular occasion, become the instrument of injustice. Justice is not law; it is "the relative embodiment of agape in the structures of society."[3] Such a "relative embodiment" of the love commandment may, on any particular occasion approach the ultimate ideal. For, history contains "endless possibilities."[4] But, it is important to be aware of the accompanying fact that "each new level of fulfilment also contains elements which stand in contradiction to perfect love."[5] Man can

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1 Harland, op. cit., p. 23.
2 Bingham, op. cit., p. 199.
3 Harland, op. cit., p. 23.
4 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of History, II, 155.
5 Ibid., p. 246.

and must strive to "realize justice in indeterminate degrees."[1] But, "all such realizations contain contradictions to, as well as approximations of, the ideal of love," and so, remain morally ambiguous.[2]

Man can but must not refuse to participate in this "morally ambiguous" situation, for the alternative is to be irresponsible, and so, to a high degree "morally ambiguous." This fact is one which the individual interested in his own piety always finds embarrassing. "Justice in a sinful world is actually maintained by a tension of competitive forces," all of which are in themselves more or less ambiguously sinful.[3] Consequently, "relative distinctions must always be made in history,"[4] and "every desire to stand beyond the contradictions... must be disavowed."[5] If there is to be any justice, or any advancement in justice, it is necessary to participate in that tension, secure a tolerable "equilibrium of power," and promote such proximate advances of social justice as are historically

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1 Ibid.
2 Ibid., p. 247.
3 Ibid., I, 298.
4 Ibid., p. 214.
5 Ibid., II, 207.

possible.[1] Niebuhr appeals to the New Testament doctrine of justification by faith.

> Justification by faith in the realm of justice means that we will not regard the pressures and counter pressures, the tensions, the overt... conflicts by which justice is achieved and maintained, as normative in the absolute sense; but neither will we ease our consciences by seeking to escape from involvement in them. We will know

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1 Because of their unwillingness to soil their hands by choosing sides and making relative decisions in social and political life, Niebuhr finds both traditional Lutheranism and (strange company) Karl Barth to be suspect of "imperilling relative moral achievements of history." (The Nature and Destiny of Man, I, 220.) As Niebuhr sees it, Barth's withdrawn and superior "plague on both your houses" attitude toward the struggle between east and west involves him in "the old dilemma of the pure prophet." Of course, "the price of absolute purity is irrelevance." (Bingham, op. cit., p. 344.) And again commenting on Barth's theology: "perhaps [it] is constructed too much for the great crises of history....Yesterday ...many of the Christian leaders of Germany...discovered that the church may be an ark in which to survive a flood. Today they seem so enamored of this function of the church that they have decided to turn the ark into a home on Mount Ararat and live in it perpetually." (Ibid., pp. 340 f.) Niebuhr is, of course, aware and appreciative of Barth's role in resisting Hitler which bore fruit in the Barmen Declaration. His critique is, therefore, more concerned with Barth's thought since then. "What seventeenth century Lutheran orthodoxy did to Luther in a century, Barth managed to do to his own thought in a few decades." (Ibid., p. 344.) Niebuhr finds it "significant that Germany, with its Augustinian-Lutheran theological inheritance, has had greater difficulty in achieving a measure of political sanity and justice than the more Pelagian, more self-righteous and religiously less profound Anglo-Saxon world." (The Nature and Destiny of Man, I, 220.)

> that we cannot purge ourselves of the sin and guilt in which we are involved by the moral ambiguities of politics without also disavowing responsibility for the creative possibilities of justice.[1]

In spite of this curious predicament of moral ambiguity, it is necessary to recognize that partial achievements and advances in justice are made. That which is morally ambiguous is only ambiguous, and not totally evil. "The capacity of communities to synthesize divergent approaches to a common problem and to arrive at a tolerably just solution proves man's capacity to consider interests other than his own."[2] "Confronted with this [morally ambiguous] situation humanity always faces a double task. The one is to reduce the anarchy of the world to some kind of immediately sufferable order and unity; and the other is to set these tentative and insecure unities and achievements under the criticism of the ultimate ideal."[3] Thus, the significance of Niebuhr's well known prayer:

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1 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, II, 234.
2 Ibid., p. 249.
3 Niebuhr, An Interpretation of Christian Ethics, pp. 60, 61.

O God, give us serenity to accept what cannot
be changed,
courage to change what should be changed,
and wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.[1]

II

The teleological dimension of the question of the meaning of life - what is God's purpose for man? - is one which Niebuhr answers cautiously. This is so because he is convinced that man's "life and history are full of contradictions which cannot be resolved in terms of rational principles,"[2] and consequently, every attempted answer "becomes involved in contradictions when fully analyzed."[3] The phenomenon of human life raises questions which are simply too large for man's intellect to answer. "No ultimate sense of the meaning of life is rationally compelling."[4] "The question...is a reasonable one. But reason alone cannot give the answer."[5]

Since "man stands too completely outside of both nature and reason to understand himself in terms of

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1 Quoted in Bingham, Courage to Change, immediately following title page.
2 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, I, 135.
3 Ibid., p. 1.
4 Kegley and Bretall, op. cit., p. 17.
5 Bingham, op. cit., p. 33.

either without misunderstanding himself," it is necessary for him to look beyond himself.[1] Niebuhr summarizes the situation with typical precision. "Man is...in the position of being unable to comprehend himself...without a principle of comprehension which is beyond his comprehension."[2] Only a transcendent norm which reveals the nature of ultimate reality will do.[3] He who is the "image of God" cannot understand himself except in terms of God.

But, at just this point in his search for meaning man is obviously confronted with a difficulty. His quest for meaning has led him to a confrontation with mystery, a "realm of mystery above and beyond the ascertainable structures" of the rational world.[4] But, that with which man has to do is not total unintelligibility.[5] The final truth about the meaning of life must transcend the merely rational, but not in such a way as to be irrational. For, to be irrational is inevitably to be meaningless.[6]

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1 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, I, 15.
2 Ibid., p. 125.
3 Ibid., p. 146.
4 Kegley and Bretall, op. cit., p. 17.
5 Niebuhr, The Self and the Dramas of History, p. 257.
6 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, II, 38.

Consequently, the search for meaning can only be satisfied with that which touches upon both rationality and mystery. "The realm of meaning, which borders on the one side on the realm of rational intelligibility, borders on the other side on mystery."[1] The experience of faith is that "mystery does not annul meaning but enriches it."[2]

The very nature of the quest, therefore - the necessity of accepting mystery along with rationality - determines that the meaning of life can only be found "by making faith the presupposition of...understanding."[3] "The clarification of the meaning of life...is not completed until man is able, by faith, to apprehend the truth which is beyond his apprehension without faith."[4] Niebuhr refers to Augustine: "there are some things which we do not believe unless we understand them; and there are other things which we do not understand unless we believe them."[5] But, if faith is made the presupposition of understanding, it is

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1 Niebuhr, The Godly and the Ungodly, p. 142.
2 Niebuhr, Faith and History, p. 115.
3 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, I, 138.
4 Ibid., II, 52.
5 Ibid., I, 138.

necessary to ask a subsequent question: Faith in what? Where do we find that which unites both mystery and intelligibility in such a way as to answer the question of the meaning of life?

It is "Biblical faith" which, according to Niebuhr, "combines a sense of mystery with specific meaning."[1] Every human personality has both a rational, structured dimension and a dimension of depth which fades into mystery. According to Biblical faith, so does the personality of God. Finite man is unable "to construct a world of meaning without finding a source and key to the structure of meaning which transcends the world beyond his own capacity to transcend it."[2] Only on the basis of this presupposition concerning "the divine consciousness" which "gives meaning to the mere succession of natural events by comprehending them simultaneously" can life actually be meaningful.[3] For, only a conscious God can

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1 Niebuhr, The Self and the Dramas of History, p. 241.

2 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, I, 164. See also Niebuhr, Faith and History, p. 55.

3 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, II, 299. The quote continues: "even as human consciousness gives meaning to segments of natural sequence by comprehending them simultaneously in memory and foresight."

meaningfully relate our fragmented, finite lives to a meaningful whole.[1]

Within Biblical faith it is more specifically "in the Christ event" that there occurs "the most definitive revelation of meaning,"[2] the structured dimension which can to some extent be rationally comprehended. "In the epic of this life and death the final mystery of the divine power which bears history is clarified; and, with that clarification, life and history are given their true meaning."[3] Indeed, in Jesus Christ we find not only the wisdom of God in which "the true meaning of life [has] been disclosed," but also the power of God in which "resources have been made available to fulfill that meaning."[4]

Niebuhr recognizes that confidence in the meaning of life depends upon confidence in the

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1 Ibid., I, 168.
2 Niebuhr, The Godly and the Ungodly, p. 133.
3 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, II, 55.
4 Ibid., p. 98. See also pp. 54 ff. Niebuhr is, of course, referring to I Cor. 1:23, 24, but also to John 1:17 where the "wisdom" of God is spoken of as the "truth," and the "power" of God as his "grace." What follows immediately is a discussion of Christ as the "wisdom of God." For a discussion of Christ as the "power of God" see p. 252 this paper.

sovereignty of God over life.[1] It is in Jesus Christ that the otherwise totally mysterious character of that sovereignty is revealed as the sovereignty of suffering love. The cross of Christ makes manifest the ineffable mystery that "God's sovereignty over history is established...not by the destruction of the evil-doers but by his own bearing of the evil."[2] In the midst of a world in which the fact of sin challenges every hope for meaning in life, we must place our final trust in the power of God to rule over us, in the power of his suffering love to forgive, and thereby overcome, the corruptions and contradictions of human life. Only on the basis of faith in such a sovereign God is it possible for man to trust that his involvement in the flux of life is good and not evil, and therefore meaningful and not meaningless.[3]

The sovereignty of suffering love, made known in the cross of Christ, reveals both the mercy and the wrath of God, and thereby speaks to man of both a

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1 Without such faith, the "vicissitudes of history" compose "an intolerable threat to man's little universe of meaning." Ibid., I, 289.
2 Ibid., II, 46.
3 Ibid., I, 137, 134.

ground for hope from beyond his life and the terrible seriousness of his life. The merciful love of God "enables him to hope for and desire the disclosure of a meaning which has a center and source beyond himself," which rules over his life, and guarantees its meaning.[1] It speaks to man of divine resources above and beyond justice. "The good news of the Gospel is that God takes the sinfulness of man into Himself; and overcomes in his own heart what cannot be overcome in human life" if moral decisions are to be at all meaningful.[2] The wrathful love of God "negates" the sinful but universally human attempt to "complete the meaning of life around the self,"[3] and thereby affirms that the relative distinctions between good and evil in life and history "are important and have ultimate significance."[4] Biblical faith thus stands in contrast to all forms of idealism, in which meaning is found in idolatrous historical cultures - it affirms

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1 Ibid., II, 215. See also Faith and History, p. 161 where Niebuhr notes that "To make suffering love rather than power the final expression of sovereignty was to embody the perplexity of history into the solution."

2 Ibid., I, 142.

3 Ibid., II, 215.

4 Ibid., p. 211.

the meaningfulness of life and history.[1]

Biblical faith is able to affirm the meaningfulness of life and history because its understanding of the sovereign, merciful judging love of God, manifest in the cross of Christ, *completes, clarifies* and *corrects* man's otherwise ambiguous understanding of himself and the meaning of his life. Thus, the cross *completes* the demand for mutual love (*eros*), which belongs to the "insights of natural religion and morality," and points toward a higher demand for sacrificial love (*agape*), which alone belongs to the ultimate nature of reality.[2] The cross *clarifies* the possibilities and limits of history by pointing to the fact of death, and thereby affirming that "the final justification for the way of *agape*...is never found in history."[3] The faith of the New

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1 Niebuhr, *Faith and History*, p. 114. Niebuhr believes that, if modern man would "cease to speculate about unanswerable metaphysical problems and make an honest effort to deal with the mysterious but universally experienced human dilemmas, [he] may find that the idea of a suffering and therefore merciful God is a clue to the meaning of existence." (*The Godly and the Ungodly*, p. 136.) Although this faith cannot be established by rational inference, it does justify itself in human experience. (*The Self and the Dramas of History*, p. 243.)

2 Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, II, 82.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 88.

Testament never guarantees the historical 'strategy' of the Cross," nor makes of it a method for success.[1] Indeed: "The love which enters history as suffering love, must remain suffering love in history. Since this love is the very law of history it may have its tentative triumphs even in history; for human history cannot stand in complete contradiction to itself. Yet history does stand in actual contradiction to the law of love; and Jesus anticipates the growth of evil as well as the growth of good in history."[2] Finally, the cross corrects man in the contrasts and contradictions of his sin. By revealing the depths of man's true self, agape exposes the depths of his self-centeredness. It exposes man's proud, selfish and sinful (and ultimately abortive) attempts to establish the meaning of his life by and for himself.[3] It shows that the law of his being contradicts the law by which he lives. It thus represents "the final goodness which stands in contradiction to all forms of human goodness in which self-assertion and love are compounded."[4]

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1 Ibid., p. 87.
2 Ibid., p. 49.
3 Ibid., p. 62.
4 Ibid., p. 89.

Only a love which is sovereign and merciful, but also wrathful, is able to compose a "norm which establishes a frame of meaning" for the sinful individual and for the whole of human history.[1] Only such a love is able to complete, clarify and correct man's otherwise mistaken understanding of the meaning of his life. For only the agape of the cross provides man with a standard of meaning which is "broad enough for the whole historical drama, high enough to contain the freedom of the individual and realistic enough to discern the corruptions of freedom in human history."[2] God's ultimate purpose for man is revealed in Christ as "a love beyond our comprehension which overrules [the] various [individual and] historical dramas....[A love] without the apprehension of which the whole of history falls into meaninglessness."[3]

When man is understood in terms of this love of Christ, it becomes clear that "the qualitative possibility of human life is its obedient subjection to the will of God."[4] But that same "qualitative

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1 Niebuhr, The Self and the Dramas of History, p. 242. Underlining mine.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., p. 256.
4 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, I, 251.

possibility" always exists for man as an "impossible possibility."[1] By this term Niebuhr does not mean "absolutely impossible." "There is always the possibility."[2] But, all of the evidence of human life proves "that there is no point in history" in which man escapes the ambiguities of his moral dilemma.[3] His existence is marked by the necessity of reaching proximate and not final solutions to his quest for meaning.

Previous mention has been made of the importance of the term "proximate" in Niebuhr's thought. It always stands for the human and historical possibility of partially realizing the divine will. Man's finite, sinful situation is such that:

> the human mind can, in the various disciplines of culture, discover and elaborate an indeterminate variety of systems of meaning...by analysing the relation of things to each other on every level of existence....If these subordinate realms of meaning claim to be no more than they are they will add to the wealth of our apprehensions about the character of existence and the richness of our insights into reality. They are furthermore valuable guides to conduct and action....If /however/ the effort is made to establish any one of these subordinate realms of meaning as the clue to the meaning of the whole, the...pursuit becomes involved in idolatry.[4]

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1 Ibid., II, 67.
2 Ibid., p. 74.
3 Ibid., p. 4.
4 Ibid., pp. 208, 209.

The various subordinate realms of meaning within human life are and must always remain subordinate. But, that fact does not render them meaningless. "The good within the finite flux has significance beyond that flux,"[1] and all proximate realizations of meaning "point to a mystery beyond themselves."[2] That mystery is the eternal purpose of God which was manifest in the cross; it is the love from which nothing can separate us. It is the mystery of God's sovereignty over life and history, a sovereignty which relates each fragmentary human life to the mystery of the whole.[3] Man cannot establish for himself a meaningful life, but God can and will establish it for him. His eternal love is able to complete man's incompleteness, resolve the ambiguities of his existence, and fulfill the meaning of his life beyond the creaturely limits of his life. "History would be [a] meaningless succession [of events] without [this] eternal purpose which bears it."[4]

In the light of this love, which is God's

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1 Ibid., p. 212.
2 Ibid., p. 211.
3 Ibid., I, 168.
4 Niebuhr, Beyond Tragedy, p. 302.

eternal purpose, man knows that "life has no meaning except in terms of responsibility."[1] Proximate though the realisation may be, man "must find himself in terms of obedience to the divine will."[2] Confidence, in a realm of ultimate meaning beyond the rationally comprehensible or historically achievable, can only be validated in experience through the diligent pursuit of proximate possibilities.[3] But, at just this all important point called human experience, the meaning of life can be validated. "The clue to the meaning of human existence is verified whenever men witness to that meaning by lives of tolerance and charity, prompted by the consciousness that they are infected by a universal inclination to make more of themselves than they ought, and therefore distrustful of their own virtue, sceptical about their apprehension of the truth and grateful for the love which other men give them, despite their obvious weaknesses."[4]

It is therefore necessary for man, seeking a

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1 Quoted in Bingham, op. cit., p. 400.
2 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, I, 15. Thus Niebuhr, at the funeral of a close friend, prayed: "We thank thee that though our years are brief, thou savest our life from vanity by making us coworkers together with thee..." (Bingham, op. cit., p. 329.)
3 Ibid., II, 211.
4 Niebuhr, The Godly and the Ungodly, p. 144.

meaningful life to (1) recognise the impossibility in this finite world of giving a final and definitive answer to this ultimate question except by pointing to the love of God, manifest in the cross, which faith recognises as ultimately determinative of the character of that answer; (2) abandon all attempts to secure the meaning of his life from his own perspective,[1] and to live by faith in the sovereign ability and willingness of God to secure it for him;[2] and (3) to seek out the various valid proximate and subordinate systems of meaning within history, and strive within the ambiguities of his life to "partially realise the meanings he discerns."[3]

III

The vocational dimension of the question of the meaning of life, with its emphasis upon the individual and his search for meaning, is one which has particularly concerned Niebuhr since his illness in the early 1950's. During a long and difficult "two years

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1 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, II, 98.
2 Ibid., pp. 107-126.
3 Ibid., p. 4.

of enforced leisure,"[1] Niebuhr realised with a new profundity that "one faces the ultimate question about the significance of one's work and realised that everything one does remains so fragmentary and incomplete except as God completes it."[2] Nevertheless, the basic outline of Niebuhr's approach to the problem is already contained in his Gifford Lectures, where the question of the individual's search for personal meaning is identified with another one: How can a man find the power to live meaningfully? An adequate exposition of Niebuhr's thought demands that consideration be given to both these questions.

Previous mention has been made of Niebuhr's contention that in Christ "both 'wisdom' and 'power' are available to man; which is to say that not only has the true meaning of life been disclosed but also that resources have been made available to fulfill that meaning."[3] In considering the teleological dimension of the primary question, it has been pointed out that Niebuhr believes that Jesus Christ, the "wisdom" of God, makes manifest

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1 Niebuhr, The Self and the Dramas of History, p. 11.

2 Quoted in Bingham, op. cit., p. 319.

3 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, II, 98; p. 241 this paper.

what man is able to know concerning God's purpose for him. It is now necessary to consider in what sense Jesus Christ is also the "power" of God which enables individuals, partially but nevertheless actually, to fulfill that meaning which Christ, as the "wisdom" of God, has made manifest.

Niebuhr considers this question "in terms of the application of a very comprehensive and profound Pauline text."[1] That text is:

> I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me, and gave himself for me.[2]

Niebuhr's discussion of the matter proceeds along the lines of a commentary on the passage.

I am Crucified with Christ: The predicament of the individual is such that he cannot fulfill the meaning of his life. He may will to do what is right, but he has not, in himself, the power to do it. Love is the very law of his being. He cannot realize himself without it. But, in trying to realize himself he "is always betrayed" into self-seeking, and therefore into not loving beyond

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1 Ibid., p. 107.
2 Galatians 2:20.

himself. Self interest, and not love, becomes the law by which he lives, though he will generally pretend "to be obedient to obligations beyond" himself, disguising his self interest "in loftier pretensions." It is the "self in this state of preoccupation with itself [which] must be 'broken' and 'shattered' or, in the Pauline phrase, 'crucified.'" This event must occur "at the very center of its being." Furthermore, "the sinful self must be destroyed from beyond itself because it does not have the power to lift itself out of its narrow interests."[1] It is this "shattering" which occurs in the confrontation of the individual with God in Christ, where man encounters the mercy and judgement, the "power and holiness of God and becomes genuinely conscious of the real source and centre of all life." This is a "perennial process" for the individual, and "occurs in every spiritual experience in which the self is confronted with the claims of God, and becomes conscious of its sinful,

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1 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, II, 113. "It cannot be saved merely by being enlightened." Ibid., p. 109.

self-centred state."[1] This destruction of the internally centered self, Niebuhr believes is "the key to the self's possibilities in history. All of life is given this norm for the realization of selfhood."[2]

Nevertheless I live: The experience of the self is that of deliverance through shattering. The old self which was impotent because it was centered upon itself, gives way to a "new self," which is the "real self" because it "lives in and for others, in the general orientation of loyalty to, and love of, God." The experience of crucifixion gives way to the experience of resurrection - the "experience of a new selfhood."[3]

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1 Ibid., pp. 108, 109. Niebuhr warns that it is necessary to "guard against the assumption that only those who know Christ 'after the flesh,' that is, in the actual historical revelation, are capable of such a conversion. A 'hidden Christ' operates in history. And there is always the possibility that those who do not know the historical revelation may achieve a more genuine repentance and humility than those who do. If this is not kept in mind the Christian faith easily becomes a new vehicle of pride." And again, "'The wind bloweth where it listeth,' said Jesus to Nicodemus; and that is a picturesque description of the freedom of divine grace in history, working miracles without any 'by your leave' of priest or church." (Ibid., p. 209.)

2 Niebuhr, The Self and the Dramas of History, p. 78.

3 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, II, 110.

Yet Not I: but Christ Liveth in Me: The "yet not I, but Christ" points toward "the double aspect of the Christian experience of grace." On the one hand, it affirms the "priority of grace," the experience that the new self is the result of a power from beyond the self. It is never an achievement, but always a gift. On the other hand, it affirms that the new self is never an ontic possession. It is never a reality which the self can claim as its own. For, "human pride and spiritual arrogance rise to new heights precisely at the point where the claims of sanctity are made without due qualification....Sainthood is corrupted whenever holiness is claimed as a simple possession." The "new self is the Christ of intention rather than an actual achievement," an intention "set in the direction of Christ as the norm."[1] For that reason, it is necessary for Christian faith to hold "a more unambiguous confidence in Christ's full disclosure of life...than in the fulfilment of life's meaning" which man will, in fact, achieve.[2]

This summary of Niebuhr's thought - obviously

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1 Ibid., pp. 114, 122.
2 Ibid., p. 61.

and openly so indebted to St. Paul - expresses his profound awareness of the impotence of the individual to live a meaningful life, and the source as well as the character of the "grace" or "power" which enables that meaningful life "nevertheless" to be lived. Christ is not only the "wisdom" of God which makes known the meaning of life, but also the "power" of God which gives to man the resources necessary to live that life meaningfully. But how does this meaningful life, revealed in Christ, actually "become flesh" in the contemporary life of the individual? How does the theology become translated into concrete actuality? How does the individual find the particular vocational "calling" which will make his personal life truly meaningful? Niebuhr answers this question by pointing to the relation of the individual to the historic community.

Man is in history, and history is in man. It is therefore necessary to include the meaning of history in any consideration of the meaning of life.[1]

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1 Ibid., p. 36. With regard to Niebuhr's understanding of the meaning of history, which, except when necessary, is not considered in this paper, Harold R. Landon believes that "for breadth of mind and grasp of history [Niebuhr's The Structure of Nations and Empires] ...is comparable to Toynbee's Study of History. (Landon, op. cit., p. 16.) And June Bingham observes that "Toynbee reviewed it with enthusiasm in the New York Times." (Bingham, op. cit., p. 262.)

Niebuhr would not wish to make the mistake of limiting the meaning of an individual's life to some aspect of historical process, but neither would he rest content with any analysis of human destiny which did not include a consideration of the seriousness of history. Both the naturalist and the idealist fail in their own ways to do justice to man as the creature who transcends history while contributing to and being a part of it. "In so far as he is involved in history, the disclosure of life's meaning must come to him in history. In so far as he transcends history the source of life's meaning must transcend history."[1] Whenever either of these two factors is lost sight of, man is also lost sight of.

The individual needs the community, for his individuality is meaningless apart from it. Indeed, "there is...no dimension of existence in which the individual is purely an individual."[2] Love is the law of his being, and if he is to fulfill the meaning of his life, it must be in terms of love for his neighbor. "The individual can realise himself only in intimate and organic relation to his fellowmen."[3]

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1 Ibid. See also Faith and History, p. 55.
2 Niebuhr, The Self and the Dramas of History, p. 247.
3 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, II, 244.

The meaning of the individual's life then, cannot be found in isolation from the community, but must be found within and for the community. Niebuhr suggests that such meaningful "activities may be roughly placed into two general categories: the quest for the truth and the achievement of just and brotherly relations with our fellowmen."[1] The individual can only find a personally meaningful life as he thus contributes to the larger social life.

But this fact about the individual's relation to the community, which Niebuhr finds to be unescapably important, is nevertheless only a part of the truth about the individual's quest for meaning. While the self "can only realize itself by endlessly being drawn out of itself into larger ends," and while "the community may provisionally be that larger end," it is also true that "it cannot be so ultimately." Any adequate analysis of the destiny of man needs to recognize that "the individual must have a higher end than the community."[2] The complex facts of human life are

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1 Ibid., p. 213. The search for truth is always subordinate to the search for justice in Niebuhr's thought. This is not because he deprecates truth, but because he knows that truth in itself may become an instrument of arrogance and so of injustice. (See p. 213 this paper.)

2 Niebuhr, The Self and the Dramas of History, p. 237.

that "the individual self is grounded in a collective history as surely as it is based in a physical organism. Its fulfilment is not possible without the fulfilment of the whole drama, yet the fulfilment of the total drama offers no adequate completion of meaning for the unique individual."[1]

Man, who exists as a part of a community, cannot understand himself or the meaning of his life apart from that community. And yet, if he understands himself and the meaning of his life only in these terms, he does not understand himself. For (as has been pointed out earlier), "to understand himself truly means to begin with a faith that he is understood from beyond himself," and also from beyond his community, and, therefore, that he can only ultimately "find himself in terms of" God.[2] The life of the individual person "is finally meaningful only in a religious dimension."[3] The "final reaches" of the individual's search for meaning only emerge in "dialogue with God."[4]

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1 Ibid., p. 256.
2 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, I, 15.
3 Quoted from Christianity and Society in Bingham, op. cit., p. 99.
4 Niebuhr, The Self and the Dramas of History, p. 76.

The vocational dimension of the question of the meaning of life finds its tentative answer within the larger social community of which the individual is a part. A sense of personal meaning is to be discovered by the individual as he contributes in love to the larger life of the community, thus fulfilling the law of his being within the historical context of his being. But ultimately, "his own life is not completely fulfilled by its organic relation to a social process" which he is able to transcend and call in question.[1] Granted the validity and necessity of the tentative historical answer, the question of the meaning of life is an ultimate question, which cannot be answered except in terms of the ultimate.[2]

IV

If in order to find personal meaning for his life in history man must contribute in love to the socio-historic community of which he is a part, it is obvious that, for Niebuhr, the vocational dimension of the primary question merges into the ethical

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1 Niebuhr, The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness, p. 61.

2 See the "eschatological dimension" pp. 265 f. this paper.

dimension: what is the meaning of the individual's life for and in relation to his neighbor? Indication has already been given of Niebuhr's ethical thought with its emphasis upon: (1) the necessity of seeking "proximate" achievements of justice (the relative embodiment of agape in a sinful world); and (2) the necessity of placing every tentative and partial achievement under the judgement of the ultimate ideal (the love commandment).[1] The ethical dimension of the primary question finds its answer within this ethical framework. The meaning of the individual's life for and in relation to his neighbor is to be found in the individual's efforts to translate the love commandment into proximate advances of truth and justice on his neighbor's behalf, and thus to promote the cause of brotherhood so as to approach a relative realization of the Kingdom of God.[2]

Niebuhr believes that the individual is confronted with the opportunity to live meaningfully for his neighbor in a world which is "filled with endless possibilities of good and evil."[3] On the

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1 See p. 229 this paper.
2 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, II, 213.
3 Ibid., p. 155.

one hand it is necessary to recognize that "every moral situation, whether individual or collective, actually discloses, when fully analysed, unending possibilities of higher fulfillment."[1] On the other hand it must be affirmed that every "effort to rescue meaning from chaos...is discovered, upon analysis, to have new possibilities of evil in it."[2] The human situation never ceases to maintain this morally ambiguous character. Even in the best of moral accomplishments, "there will be some corruption, as well as deficiency, of virtue and truth on the new level of achievement."[3] Man, therefore, stands before the opportunity to live meaningfully for his neighbor both with a cause for hope and a cause for humility.

The love commandment, which in Niebuhr's thought might be called the constitution of the Kingdom of God, calls upon the individual in every political

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1 Ibid., p. 156.

2 Niebuhr, An Interpretation of Christian Ethics, p. 63. There is no inevitable or guaranteed moral progress built into history. (Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, II, 155.)

3 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, II, 156. Niebuhr therefore, concludes that, "history... has no solution to its own problem." (Ibid., p. 155. See also pp. 207, 211.)

and social situation "to come to terms with the claims of other life."[1] The individual will find the meaning of his life for and in relation to his neighbor confirmed as he seeks in love to respond to those claims. His diligent pursuit of proximations of agape on his neighbor's behalf will validate the meaning that is both with and beyond the proximations.[2] For, every moment confronts man with the imminent nearness of the Kingdom of God, and presents him with the possibility of its proximate realization. Of course, the individual must never imagine himself to have achieved or secured the Kingdom of God. For, in this life, "the 'Kingdom of God' which we achieve in history is never the same as the Kingdom for which we pray," and "realised eschatology" is always "proximate eschatology."[3] Consequently, the individual must never finalize or absolutize his relative achievements, but must ever live in the hope that "time will make some solutions possible tomorrow which are not possible today."[4]

Nevertheless, and in spite of its partial

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1 Ibid., p. 192.
2 Ibid., p. 211.
3 Ibid., p. 280.
4 Landon, op. cit., p. 123.

character, the individual does have the opportunity of living meaningfully for his neighbor - a fact which experience confirms. Tolerably just solutions to historically insoluble problems prove "man's capacity to consider interests other than his own."[1] Sacrificial love, though not an historic likelihood, is always an historic possibility,[2] and although there will be no "perfect fulfillment" in history, all proximate achievements "may rise in indeterminate degrees [so that they actually] find their fulfillment in a more perfect love and brotherhood."[3] Therefore, such achievements may always approach the relative realization of the Kingdom in history.

The meaning of the individual's life for and in relation to neighbor is realized as the individual seeks in love to "come to terms with the claims of other life."[4]

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1 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, II, 249.

2 Ibid., p. 74. Niebuhr notes that "there is no evidence that the proximate solutions of man's perennial problems become by degree, absolute solutions. There is no evidence that highly intelligent individuals find it easier than simple folk to come to terms with their fellow men, though intelligence may produce a social system of wider scope and greater complexity." Faith and History, p. 110.

3 Ibid., p. 248. See also p. 156.

4 It should, of course, be observed that this answer to the ethical dimension of the primary question comprises Niebuhr's fundamental concern, and is, in a sense, almost identical with the whole.

V

The depth of Niebuhr's concern over the ultimate or eschatological dimension of the question of the meaning of life becomes immediately apparent in his precise formulation of the problem:

> Everything in human life and history moves towards an end. By reason of man's subjection to nature and finiteness this "end" is a point where that which exists ceases to be. It is finis. By reason of man's rational freedom the "end" has another meaning. It is the purpose and goal of his life and work. It is telos. This double connotation of end as both finis and telos expresses, in a sense, the whole character of human history and reveals the fundamental problem of human existence. All things in history move towards both fulfillment and dissolution....The problem is that the end as finis is a threat to the end as telos.[1]

What is the meaning of life in the perspective of death?

Niebuhr is convinced that although finitude is a threat to meaning, it is not in itself meaningless, nor is it experienced as meaningless. Man's daily life confirms the fact that in spite of finitude, there remains "a dimension of value and meaning in the lives of our loved ones which death challenges but cannot annul."[2] Nevertheless, the meaning of

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1 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, II, 287.
2 Bingham, op. cit., p. 323.

human life is "never completely contained in, or satisfied by, the historical-natural process, no matter to what level this process may rise."[1] When ultimately considered, "hope in the meaningfulness of human existence must be nourished by roots which go deeper than the deserts of history, with their periodic droughts."[2] Meaning in the midst of historical finitude must be understood as pointing beyond that finitude, as "any rigorous examination of the problems of men...clearly reveals."[3] Man's situation is such that he "can discern only partial meanings and can only partially realize the meanings he discerns,"[4] so that human history "has no solution to its own problem."[5] Christian faith

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1 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, II, 96.
2 Niebuhr, Beyond Tragedy, p. 131.
3 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, II, 96. However, "there is no experience which points irrefutably to the particular divine ground and end of history which Christian faith discerns in Christ and the Cross.../Although/ it is the only principle of interpretation which does justice to the...human situation." (Ibid., p. 97.) Therefore, although the truth concerning the meaning of life implied in Christian faith cannot be technically "proven," "the wisdom of faith...merely closes the structure of meaning on the basis of experience and insists that it is related to the structure of reality itself." (Niebuhr, The Godly and the Ungodly, p. 135 and The Self and the Dramas of History, p. 259.)
4 Ibid., p. 4.
5 Ibid., p. 156.

lives in the bold hope "that our fragmentary lives will be completed in a total and larger plan than any which we control or comprehend."[1] That final hope is understood "from the perspective of a centre of life and meaning in which each fragment is related to the plan of the whole, to the will of God."[2] It is not a confidence in man, or in human possibilities. It is oriented toward and determined by God, who alone is able "to complete what remains incomplete in human existence."[3] For Christian faith is ultimately "eschatological," and this is a fact "which one cannot eliminate by trying to contain all facets of meaning in the processes of history."[4] It places its ultimate trust in a "mystery...of a power and a love beyond our comprehension which overrules these various historical dramas..., a mystery without the apprehension of which the whole of history falls into meaninglessness."[5]

In attempting to develop further his understanding

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1 Kegley and Bretall, op. cit., p. 6. Niebuhr continues by affirming "that a part of the completion is the forgiveness...of the evils into which we fall by our frantic efforts to complete our own lives or to endow them with /ultimate/ significance."

2 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, I, 168.

3 Niebuhr, Beyond Tragedy, 297.

4 Kegley and Bretall, op. cit., p. 442.

5 Niebuhr, The Self and the Dramas of History, p. 288.

of the eschatological dimension of the question of the meaning of life, Niebuhr refers to the "three fundamental symbols: the return of Christ, the last judgement and the resurrection."[1] Niebuhr observes that these symbols "cannot be taken literally because it is not possible for finite minds to comprehend that which transcends and fulfills history. The finite mind can only use symbols and pointers." However, "all theologies which do not take these symbols seriously will be discovered upon close analysis not to take history seriously either. They presuppose an eternity which annuls rather than fulfills the historical process."[2]

The Parousia, Niebuhr believes, "dominates" the other symbols because it "expresses the faith that existence cannot ultimately defy its own norm." Love is the law of man's being and will some day be vindicated as such. "To believe that the suffering Messiah will return at the end of history" is to live in the certainty that "God's sovereignty over the world and history" will climax in "the final supremacy of love." Love will one day be revealed

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1 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, II, 290.
2 Ibid., p. 289.

to be what faith has trusted it to be. "Against utopianism the Christian faith insists that the final consummation of history lies beyond the conditions of the temporal process. Against otherworldliness it asserts that the consummation fulfills rather than negates, the historical process."[1]

The Last Judgement, according to Niebuhr, symbolizes the seriousness of man's life in history. It confirms the suspicions of experience that "the differences between good and evil are not" to be finally "swallowed up in a distinctionless eternity."[2] Such a faith is an absolutely necessary prerequisite to ethical seriousness and meaningful living. "The culmination of history must include not merely the divine completion of human incompleteness but a purging of human guilt and sin by divine judgement and mercy."[3] This judgement must have the character of a "final judgement upon all other judgements" which themselves always participate in the morally ambiguous nature of life as we know it.[4] Consequently, "the final enigma of

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1 Ibid., pp. 290, 291. "The Antichrist stands at the end of history to indicate that history cumulates, rather than solves, the essential problems of human existence." Ibid., p. 318.
2 Ibid., p. 292.
3 Ibid., p. 288.
4 Ibid., p. 293.

of history is...not how the righteous will gain victory over the unrighteous, but how the evil in every good and the unrighteousness of the righteous is to be overcome."[1] The fact that Christ, and not God, is described as judge indicates that life is to be "judged by its own ideal possibility, and not by the contrast between the finite and the eternal character of God. The judgement is upon sin and not finiteness."[2] The final character of that judgement will be love. The details of its composition we cannot, of course, imagine. But, "the anticipation of a final judgement and fulfillment means an emancipation from the proximations of good and the concretions of evil which represent the 'standards' of history,"[3] and indicates that "history must be purged as well as completed."[4] It is, of course, "unwise for Christians to claim any knowledge of either the furniture of heaven or the temperature of hell; or to be too certain about any details of the Kingdom of God in which history is consummated. But it is prudent to accept the testimony of the heart, which affirms the fear of

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1 Ibid., p. 43.
2 Ibid., p. 292.
3 Ibid., p. 51.
4 Ibid., p. 4.

judgement."[1]

The Resurrection, in Niebuhr's thought, "affirms the eternal significance of...historical existence," and does this "from the standpoint of faith in a God, who has the power to bring history to completion."[2] It is to be radically distinguished from any concept of the "immortality of the soul" - a doctrine which implies the fulfillment of life as a human possibility. The Christian symbol of the resurrection denies the "consummation...as a human possibility," and affirms that "only God can solve this problem."[3] But just this presupposition of faith is necessary to any adequate hope for telos beyond finis. For, "in the symbol of the resurrection of the body, the 'body' is indicative of the contribution which nature makes to human individuality and to all historical realizations."[4] It thus affirms the eternal significance of the individual, human person. This is necessary because "the end of an individual life is, for him, the end of history; and every individual is a Moses who perishes outside the promised land."[5]

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1 Ibid., p. 294.
2 Ibid., p. 296.
3 Ibid., p. 293.
4 Ibid., p. 296.
5 Ibid., p. 308.

On the other hand, the doctrine of the resurrection "implies that eternal significance belongs to the whole unity of an historical realization," and thus includes the ultimate significance of the historical society.[1] "Consummation is...conceived not as absorption into the divine but as loving fellowship with God."[2] Indeed, "the idea of a 'general resurrection'...does justice to both the value of the individual life, without which the fulfillment of history would be incomplete; and to the meaning of the whole course of history for the individual, without which his life cannot be fulfilled."[3]

Niebuhr cautions that "it is important to maintain a decent measure of restraint in expressing the Christian hope."[4] Faith must admit "that it does not yet appear what we shall be"[5] But, on the other hand, "it is equally important not to confuse restraint with uncertainty about the validity of the hope....It is an integral part of the total Biblical

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1 Ibid., p. 296.
2 Ibid., p. 297.
3 Ibid., p. 311.
4 Ibid., p. 298.
5 I John 3:2.

conception of the meaning of life."[1] Niebuhr is not impressed by rationalistic arguments against the resurrection. "Everyone who rejects the basic conceptions, implicit in the idea of the resurrection, is either a moral nihilist or an utopian, covert or overt. Since there are few moral nihilists, it follows that most moderns are utopians. Imagining themselves highly sophisticated in their emancipation from religion, they give themselves to the most absurd hopes about the possibilities of man's natural history."[2] Over against these "absurd hopes" of modern rationalism, Niebuhr recognizes in the doctrine of the resurrection a "final venture in modesty for the mysterious human self, which understands...that there are heights and depths of human selfhood which are beyond any system of rational intelligibility, but not beyond the comprehension of faith and hope."[3]

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1 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, II, 293. Niebuhr describes his early "offense" over the doctrine of the resurrection, and relates how, as a "young theologian" graduating from seminary, he and his colleagues "were not certain that we could honestly express our faith in such a formula. If we were finally prevailed upon to do so it was usually with a patronizing air toward the Christian past....Yet some of us have been persuaded /since/ to take the stone which we then rejected and make it the head of the corner." Beyond Tragedy, pp. 289, 290.

2 Niebuhr, Beyond Tragedy, p. 305.

3 Niebuhr, The Self and the Dramas of History, p. 257.

What is the meaning of life in the perspective of death? Niebuhr answers the eschatological dimension of the question of the meaning of life by pointing beyond death to the God of Christian faith and hope. He appeals, for clarification, to the traditional symbols concerning the parousia, the last judgement, and the resurrection, finding in them the most adequate expression of that faith and hope. But, ultimately the meaning of life can only be understood in terms of the Ultimate, the giver of life. Therefore, "wisdom about our destiny is dependent upon a humble recognition of the limits of our knowledge." Such wisdom, learned from the cross, must be apprehended with both faith and repentance. "Faith completes our ignorance without pretending to possess its certainties as knowledge; and...contrition mitigates our pride without destroying our hope."[1]

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1 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, II, 321.

VI

Niebuhr's answer to the question of the meaning of life can be summarized by the following points:

I. Man stands too completely outside of both nature and reason to understand himself in terms of either without misunderstanding himself. If he is to comprehend the meaning of his life he must have reference to a principle of comprehension which is in some sense beyond his comprehension - a transcendent norm.

II. That transcendent norm can only be meaning-ful as it touches upon both mystery and rationality. Faith, which by the very nature of the quest is a presupposition for understanding, finds the mystery of the transcendent norm in the personality of God, who comprehends and relates each fragmentary life to the larger whole, and finds the rationality of the transcendent norm in the cross of Christ which reveals the love which is both the wisdom and the power of God.

III. The sovereignty of suffering love, made known

in the cross of Christ, reveals both the mercy and the wrath of God, and thereby speaks to man of both a ground for hope from beyond his life, and the terrible seriousness of his life. Agape is the fundamental fact about God, and the fundamental law of human existence. Only this norm is able to establish a frame of meaning broad enough for the whole historical drama, high enough to contain the freedom of the individual, and realistic enough to discern the corruptions of freedom in human history.

IV. The ambiguities of sin determine that there can only be proximate realisations of obedience to the law of love within history, and it is therefore justice and not pure agape which is an actual human possibility. Man must undertake the diligent pursuit of proximate possibilities, achieving within history not the final Kingdom of God, but various subordinate realms of meaning. It is just in these subordinate realms of meaning within history where man must find the meaning of his life, for man is in history as history is in man.

V. Nevertheless, all such historical realisations are in themselves incomplete, and faith must

ultimately look beyond history for the fulfillment of history. Faith finds the meaning of life in the sovereignty of God who gives (or will give) ultimate significance to the relative distinctions and achievements of life in history by fulfilling them in love beyond the ambiguities of history.

VI. Thus man, in seeking an answer to the question of the meaning of life, must (1) recognise the impossibility in this finite world of giving or achieving a final and definitive answer to this ultimate question except by pointing to the sovereign, suffering love of the personal God, which faith recognises as ultimately determinative of the character of that answer; (2) abandon all attempts to secure the meaning of life for and in himself, living by faith in the sovereign ability and willingness of God to secure it for him; and (3) seek out the various proximate and subordinate systems of meaning within history, striving to realise the meanings he discerns, humbly confident that meaning within the finite flux has meaning beyond that flux.

Niebuhr's answer to the question of the meaning of life has some striking parallels with that of

Karl Heim. Both men consider it to be fundamental that reference be made to the Biblical concepts of (1) the personal God, and (2) a final consummation beyond history in which the "ambiguities" (Niebuhr) or "polarities" (Heim) of this life are resolved and fulfilled. Niebuhr, again with Heim, believes that man stands too completely outside of nature, reason and history to understand himself totally in terms of any or all of these without misunderstanding himself. The transcendent "self" can only rightly understand itself as, in faith, it understands that it is understood from beyond itself - that is, by God. But, Niebuhr's answer to the question of the meaning of life is characteristically different in that he finds in the cross of Christ a structural principle for interpreting the meaning of life and history as a whole.

Both man and history find their unity and meaning in the sovereign, suffering love of God which is the structural law and essential character of reality. The law of love thus becomes the key by which Niebuhr examines man's life in society and history, exposes his sin which threatens the meaning of his life, and expresses God's call to new and

higher obedience. Man realizes the meaning of his life as he recognizes and embraces this fundamental law of his being in relation to his fellows. The whole of Niebuhr's work can be interpreted as directed toward making manifest the reality and responsibility to which this basic love of God, operative in and beneath human history, calls the individual and his society. To a high degree, Niebuhr has understood the Biblical theme of God's sovereign suffering love, supporting, judging and directing life and history, and he has been able to prophetically relate these to contemporary ethics, sociology and politics in such a way as to command unusual attention in the secular world by revealing the present to be rather obviously but a continuation of Biblical history itself.

Furthermore, Niebuhr's answer to the question of the meaning of life has the distinction that - understanding that man is in history and history is in man - he has seen clearly the relation implied in the question of the meaning of life to the larger question of the meaning of history. In an essay which can hardly be surpassed for demonstrating both the uniqueness of the individual and his intimate and inseparable

relationship to the larger historic community,[1] Niebuhr writes that "the individual self is grounded in a collective history as surely as it is based in a physical organism."[2] This sentence points to both a strength and a weakness in Niebuhr's thought. The strength is in the recognition that the question of the meaning of life can not be adequately answered apart from the question of the meaning of history, that the two are intimately related though certainly not identical. The weakness is that, while recognizing that the self is also grounded in a physical organism, Niebuhr does not recognize or develop the importance of the relationship of the question of the meaning of life to the question of the meaning of nature (though just such a recognition is implied in the above quoted statement). As with history, man is in nature and nature is in man, and the question of the meaning of life can not be answered apart from a consideration of the meaning of nature.

Now, Niebuhr's thought is not totally without an appreciation of nature. He understands that the basis of selfhood is in the particularity of the body,

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1 Niebuhr, "Individual and Collective Destinies in the Contemporary Situation," in The Self and the Dramas of History, Ch. 23.

2 pp. 256-259 this paper.

and sees in the hope for the resurrection a symbol of the contribution which nature makes to the ultimate affirmation of individuality and history. Most often, however, Niebuhr, when he considers nature at all, tends to identify nature with creaturely finitude, and then to show how finitude leads to anxiety and anxiety to temptation. This may be a very perceptive thought about the origin of sin, but it is hardly the whole truth concerning the richness of nature. At just this point Niebuhr's thought is surprisingly unconstructive - even silent.

Paul Tillich tells the following story:

> Now you know, perhaps, that Niebuhr and I often walked through nature. It was mostly Riverside Park, but anyhow there are some very beautiful trees; and while he was developing his future big book, I sometimes was deviated by a tree, or the river, or clouds behind it, and suddenly I noticed he didn't care for this at all. When I told him that I cared for this he called me a German Romanticist.[1]

Niebuhr's willingness to allow man's existence in nature to be essentially affirmed as naturalism wants to affirm it[2] amounts to the abandonment of the theological task on this important issue. For, since man's life is a life in nature, just as it is

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1 Tillich, in Landon, op. cit., p. 39.
2 See p.216 this paper.

a life in history, and though it transcends both of these, it is not possible to ask the meaning of life apart from the meaning of nature, or fully to answer the one without touching upon the other. Insofar as Niebuhr's willingness to affirm nature with naturalism means that he intends to be informed by the empirical facts which natural science presents, his position can hardly be challenged. But, to leave the interpretation of these natural facts to an a-theological naturalism is similar to allowing the interpretation of history to a-theological historians - which very thing Niebuhr is not prone to do. Thus, Neibuhr's thought - dynamically searching, relevant and meaningful with regard to man's life in history - practically never touches upon an interpretation of man's life in and as a natural creature in the natural universe.

Niebuhr states that meaningful activities can be found in both (1) the search for "truth," and (2) the achievement of "brotherly relations."[1] But, unless "brotherly relations" is meant to refer to matters other than "justice" (which in context it is not), it

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1 See p. 258 this paper.

is difficult to see how, for example, the farmer, let alone the assembly line worker for whom the early Niebuhr so diligently sought justice,[1] has much opportunity of finding a meaningful life within the framework of this definition. Indeed, "brotherly relations" is itself a much larger category than can be covered by "justice," though in itself "brotherly relations" leaves still unexplored the meaning of man as a phenomenon in the natural world.

The weakness occurs because Niebuhr, rather than actually interpreting life in terms of agape, first interprets agape in terms of ethics. Thus, the relative embodiment of agape within the ambiguities of history is understood by Niebuhr simply as justice. The extent to which this interpretation is valid should not be minimised - but neither should it be finalised. For, while appropriate to matters of ethical concern, agape understood as justice says practically nothing at all to matters which are largely outside the realm of ethics (probably nothing is totally outside the realm of ethics). Sin, indeed, challenges man's hope for meaning,[2] but so does

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1 See Bingham, op. cit., Ch. 11 "The Sin of Ford."
2 See p. 242 this paper.

disease, and the innumerable problems that arise from the fact that man is an "animal" within the physical universe. Agape in relation to the natural order is closer to a principle of health than to a principle of justice, as the New Testament soteria, "salvation," suggests.

Thus, Niebuhr's lack of attention to theological concerns largely outside the scope of ethics leads to a distortion, and cheats his theology of a wider application than it might otherwise have, and should have. Of course, Niebuhr's interest is ethics, and it is not appropriate to criticise him for not being interested in nature. But, it is appropriate to point out that because of his undeveloped thought concerning nature, his answer to the question of the meaning of life is not finally adequate.

It is important to note at this point that Bultmann's criticism of every Weltanschauung is not appropriate to this criticism of Niebuhr. Indeed, Niebuhr's use of the love commandment in interpreting both personal life and history demonstrates the extent to which Bultmann's fear of a Weltanschauung misses the mark. Agape, just as Niebuhr understands it, is a highly satisfactory clue to the meaning of

a considerable portion of man's experiences. The criticism at issue, therefore, is the breadth of the general principle as interpreted and applied by Niebuhr, and not the principle itself. For, Niebuhr could develop agape in terms of "justice" on the ethical, social and historical level, and, say, in terms of "health" on the physical, biological, psychological, natural level. The criticism is primarily concerned with an undeveloped aspect of Niebuhr's thought, and not a fundamental structural weakness.

Niebuhr's answer to the question of the meaning of life is unusually satisfying in spite of the significant areas he leaves unexplored. It is generally conceded that no other churchman has had as much influence upon the life, and particularly the secular life, of contemporary America. Niebuhr has shown a unique ability to bring the insights of Christian faith out of the pages of Scripture, and down from the idealism of the church, and meaningfully relate these to the personal, ethical, social and political structures of human life. It is unusual to find a theology which has so successfully "proven" itself in the minds and lives of a society

without <u>in any sense</u> commending the society to itself through flattery. If, then, Niebuhr's answer to the question of the meaning of life is to be found in some sense inadequate, it must not be without first recognizing the extent to which an untold number of people, within and without the church, owe their own sense of social responsibility, and their own experiences of the meaningfulness of life, to Reinhold Niebuhr.

CHAPTER VI

The Meaning of Life

in the

Theology of Henry Nelson Wieman

I

In a *Festschrift* recently published in his honor, Henry Nelson Wieman is characterized as "the most comprehensive and most distinctively *American* theologian of our century."[1] Certainly Wieman's theological posture stands in radical contradistinction to the position of European neo-orthodoxy. For, Wieman wishes to reject completely the kind of metaphysics which would place God outside of the objectifiable world. His theology makes no recourse to the "transcendental" except insofar as that term may refer to that which is not *yet* known.[2]

> Our conviction is that there are no two such realms /as the objectifiable and the transcendental/.... The two are one. If the humpty dumpty of total fact were indeed broken in two we could never get him together again. But the great fall and break has never occurred except in the form of a nightmare which we have dreamed, and are now unable to put out of our minds.[3]

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1 *The Empirical Theology of Henry Nelson Wieman*, ed. by Robert W. Bretall (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963), p. x.

2 Henry Nelson Wieman, *The Source of Human Good* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), pp. 8, 9.

3 Henry Nelson Wieman, *Religious Experience and Scientific Method* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1926), p. 148.

Because "religious experience is experience of an object...which is as truly external to the individual as is any tree or stone he may experience,...religion must plant itself firmly on the data of sense."[1] "Religious truth...must be discovered and tested by the same methods by which any truth is attained."[2] God must be defined "in terms of concrete experience,"[3] and "theology must be empirical."[4] This radically rational approach to epistemology, rooted in the pragmatic empiricism of William James and the instrumentalism of John Dewey, gives Wieman's theological stance its characteristically American flavor.[5]

Before turning to the question of the meaning of life in Wieman's thought, further consideration must be given to his understanding of the task of theology. According to Wieman, the proper subject matter of theology is revealed when an observation is made and a question is asked. The observation

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1 Ibid., p. 5.
2 Henry Nelson Wieman, The Wrestle of Religion with Truth (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927), p. 152. See also Alfred North Whitehead's subsequent book, Religion in the Making (Cambridge: University Press, 1930), p. 47.
3 Wieman, Religious Experience and Scientific Method, p. 10.
4 Wieman, "Intellectual Autobiography," The Empirical Theology of Henry Nelson Wieman, p. 3.
5 Randolph Crump Miller, "Wieman's Theological Empiricism," The Empirical Theology of Henry Nelson Wieman, p. 22.

concerns "man's capacity for undergoing radical transformation" either in the direction of "cruelty and misery" or of "saintly virtue and blessedness."[1] The question which emerges from this observation is "What can transform man in such a way as to save him from the depths of evil and bring him to the greatest good?"[2] Religious inquiry is misdirected when seeking the transcendent ideal, "infinite being or cosmic wholeness," while "the mass of humanity cry for salvation."[3] "Increasingly," writes Wieman, "I am convinced that religious inquiry is misdirected when some presence pervading the total cosmos is sought to solve the religious problem."[4] "Man in existence is the religious problem, not the cosmos and not eternal being.... Furthermore, since all existence is process, the religious problem is man and the processes which create and destroy, save and pervert, liberate and

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1 Henry Nelson Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1958), p. 9.

2 Ibid., p. 10. Wieman notes that the traditional term for that which has such transforming power is "grace." "Intellectual Autobiography," The Empirical Theology of Henry Nelson Wieman, p. 4.

3 Henry Nelson Wieman, Intellectual Foundation of Faith (New York: Philosophical Library, 1961), p. 105.

4 Wieman, "Intellectual Autobiography," The Empirical Theology of Henry Nelson Wieman, p. 4.

bind."[1] Theology must concern itself with neither cosmological speculation nor attempts to revive a dead tradition but rather with what in fact saves man from evil and delivers him to good.

In order to grasp this fact theology must make use of the scientific or empirical method. For Wieman this means "the method of analysis, observation, inference, prediction, experiment and logical coherence."[2] Such a method "imposes no constraint on the passionate concern one has for the problem."[3] It does, however, impose a restraint upon theological "arrogance" and "irresponsible childishness."[4] Genuine faith, "like breathing or love, may yield experiences from which reason may obtain knowledge not otherwise accessible."[5] But

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1 Ibid., p. 10.
2 Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment, p. 138.
3 Ibid., p. 197.
4 Wieman, The Source of Human Good, p. 211.
5 Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment, p. 137. Also, Alfred North Whitehead, Religion in the Making, "Mothers can ponder many things in their hearts which their lips cannot express. These many things, which are thus known, constitute the ultimate religious evidence, beyond which there is no appeal." (p. 56) However, while "such emotions are evidence of some vivid experience..., they are a very poor guarantee for its correct interpretation." (Ibid.) "It is not true, however, that we observe best when we are entirely devoid of emotion. Unless there is a direction of interest, we do not observe at all." (Ibid., p. 110.)

such faith is not in itself reliable knowledge. "Faith must generate the insight; reason must discover what the insight truly signifies."[1] Without such reason, faith may be led to disaster by assuming false propositions are true and by ignoring the search for that which is true. "The canons of rational consistency are important, not because all experience can be presented in a rational scheme, but as man's protection against illusion, nonsense, and the imposition of untestable doctrines upon his search for religious truth."[2] Religious maturity confines its beliefs to the demands of evidence, rather than the dictates of desire.[3] Faith must "submit humbly to tests of truth; and nowhere is this more imperative than in matters high and holy, where human desire is most insistent and impatient and pride most presumptuous."[4]

Theology must submit itself to the canons of empirical method not "to achieve intellectual respectability, nor to conform to the modern way of

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1 Ibid., p. 143.
2 Daniel Day Williams, "Wieman as a Christian Theologian," The Empirical Theology of Henry Nelson Wieman, p. 79.
3 Wieman, The Source of Human Good, p. 99.
4 Ibid., p. 211.

thinking," but in order to be true to its own object.[1] It must seek "to achieve a system of affirmations correctly specifying what does in truth have the character and power to transform man as he cannot transform himself, to save him from his self-destructive propensities and lead him to the best that human life can attain, provided that the required conditions are met."[2] In undertaking this task neither tradition[3] nor imaginative speculation but only actual events and processes from the world of fact are admissible as evidence. For, it is within the world of hard fact that man must live, and only that which has the force of fact has, in fact, the power to transform him.[4]

Wieman criticises much contemporary theological work for what he calls the "evocative use of words."[5] His point is that words "may be used either to designate an object or evoke a sentiment." Theology is weakened and rendered unnecessarily ambiguous when

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1 Wieman, Intellectual Foundations of Faith, p. 179.
2 Ibid., p. 180. Underlining mine.
3 "Western man must find his strength in his own tradition - we have to accept this inescapable fact." Source of Human Good, p. 263. However, the needs of our time demand that it "should undergo extensive re-interpretation." Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment, p. 262.
4 Wieman, Intellectual Foundations of Faith, p. 57.
5 Wieman, Religious Experience and Scientific Method, p. 48.

the theologian pretends "to use words for designating objects when [he] is really using them for the sake of their sentimental associations."[1] Loyalty and commitment are thus transferred "from the proper objects of faith to the words" that, perhaps, once designated those objects.[2] There is, indeed, a place for the use of "non-cognitive" symbols and words. This is particularly true in worship.

> Only the non-cognitive symbol can awaken, express, vivify, and intensify the experience of quality which is the actual content of any existing thing. But, all existing things having these qualities also have structures by which they can be known and described, and by which action can be guided in dealing with them ....What commands our faith also has a structure by which it can be known and distinguished from other kinds of being.[3]

Theology must describe that structure in terms of cognitive symbols.

The failure of theology to adhere to this distinction between cognitive and non-cognitive symbols has led to the encouragement of idolatry in which the creations of sentiment and imagination are served rather than the true God.[4] Claiming truth

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1 Ibid., p. 49.
2 Ibid., p. 50.
3 Brotsll, pp. 13, 14.
4 Wieman, The Wrestle of Religion with Truth, p. 179.

beyond the normal tests for truth, such theology places itself beyond the reach of any corrective. Since only "knowledge based on evidence is subject to correction," non-empirical theology "is idolatrous while knowledge is not."[1]

> The supernaturalist may object that man should not presume to discern and thereby dictate the character and depth of God - that to do so is idolatrous. The answer is that you dictate to God and commit idolatry of an equally dangerous kind if you possess no objective criterion for distinguishing between the work of man and the work of God.[2]

Wieman believes that our time demands "a degree of religious certainty such as no other time ever demanded," and the theologian, if he is truly to be of service, must come to grips with this demand.[3] Theologians who admonish man "to serve the eternal when, in fact, they can only serve something going

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1 Bretall, p. 190. Obviously reacting to criticism, Wieman writes that the "practice of identifying one's personal faith with original Christianity and with 'biblical faith' seems to give unquestionable authority to the pronouncements made. But the authority is false because men of equal scholarship, making the same claim, disagree radically." What actually happens is that "each proclaims...his own personal faith derived from a Christian tradition which has been changing for two thousand years." (Bretall, p. 18.) "Biblical faith" is a favorite expression of Niebuhr's.

2 Howard L. Parsons, "The New Reformation," The Empirical Theology of Henry Nelson Wieman, ed. by Robert W. Bretall, p. 120.

3 Wieman, Religious Experience and Scientific Method, p. 239.

on in time...are blinded to the way of salvation laid open in the temporal process. Seduced by the Greek idol of eternity, they cannot find the living God in time."[1] Only a "God in time" can possibly be of any relevance to man's quest for transformation since no "transcendental reality" beyond the concrete world of actual events "could ever do anything," and certainly could not be "certain."[2] For, "certainty" has no meaning apart from the certainty of this world. Therefore, the "desperate need" of our day is a theology that "can direct man's commitment to the creative source of all human good as it works in the temporal world, open to rational-empirical search and to service by modern technology."[3] Only such a God can truly be our God because "man and God can deal with one another only where man is."[4]

Wieman does not mean to imply that theology

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1 Wieman, The Source of Human Good, pp. 36, 37. Wieman believes that his own theology is closer to a mature expression of Hebrew than of Greek thought because the Jewish God "works creatively in history" while the God of Greek tradition "is essentially a system of forms." (Ibid., p. 7.)

2 Ibid., p. 8.

3 Ibid., p. 34.

4 Wieman, Intellectual Foundation of Faith, p. 76.

will comprehend the whole truth about God and man in its empirical conclusions. Indeed, "any intellectual formulation about a concrete reality is never more than a meager, sketchy abstraction pertaining to it." The actual object of theology is "infinitely complex and rich in quality" and "in its depth fades into mystery."[1] In relation to it the "consciousness" of the theologian "is like a tiny periscope which rises above the vast ocean of sustaining reality."[2] His intellectual formulations are fragmentary and subject to revision. God is greater than man's thoughts. "But all this can be combined with the acceptance of an answer as the best working solution found to date and living by it until a better is attained."[3]

Empirical theology accommodates itself to the fact of its limited knowledge by use of a dual commitment. On the one hand commitment is guided by the best results which honest inquiry has been able to discover; but on the other and deeper

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1 Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment, p. 3.
2 Henry Nelson Wieman and Walter Marshall Horton, The Growth of Religion (New York: Willett, Clark & Company, 1938), p. 378.
3 Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment, p. 197.

level, one is "motivated by the intention to give himself, in the wholeness of his being so far as he is able, to what in truth does save and transform man, no matter how different it may be from one's idea about it."[1] Thus, commitment is ultimately "not to a belief but to the actuality which a belief seeks to apprehend."[2] The belief is a means by which life may be ordered on a cognitive level. But, man must not be committed to his own beliefs.[3] For him to be so is "to be committed to the limitations of his own mind."[4]

This recognition by Wieman of two levels of commitment permits him to achieve an unusually high degree of freedom from his own theological propositions. At the conclusion of Man's Ultimate Commitment he writes:

> I know that I cannot be in error in holding the belief that I am at least partially in error concerning the character of the reality to which I am ultimately committed. Hence I know with certainty that I am ultimately given

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1 Wieman, "Intellectual Autobiography," The Empirical Theology of Henry Nelson Wieman, ed. by Robert W. Bretall, p. 7.

2 Wieman, Intellectual Foundation of Faith, p. 2.

3 Ibid., p. 113.

4 Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment, p. 21. See also "Commitment for Theological Inquiry," The Journal of Religion, July, 1962, XLII, no. 3, 171-184.

> to what is more than, and in some respects different from, anything affirmed in this book. With this triumph over error I make my last commitment: I cast my error, my failure, and my guilt into the keeping of creative and transforming power.[1]

II

The teleological dimension of the question of the meaning of life is answered within the structure of Wieman's thought in the context of his doctrine of God. Accordingly, an extensive consideration of what Wieman means by "God" will help to unfold his understanding of God's purpose for man.

Wieman defines God with reference to his understanding of the religious problem in general.[2] God is to be understood as that which "operates in human life with such character and power that it will transform man as he cannot transform himself, saving him from evil and leading him to the best that human

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1 Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment, p. 306.
2 See pp. 289, 190 this paper.

life can ever reach, provided he meet the required conditions."[1] Wieman understands, of course, that such a definition is "purely formal." "It does not tell what God may be. It only indicates the region in which he is to be sought."[2]

Wieman believes that his definition of God renders the old question about God's actual existence (Is there a God?) obsolete. "That there is such a Something" upon which human life depends for its welfare, deliverance, transformation and increased abundance "cannot be doubted."[3] The only significant

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1 Wieman, "Intellectual Autobiography," The Empirical Theology of Henry Nelson Wieman, ed. by Robert W. Bretall, p. 3. Wieman notes that "religion is often presented in such a way as to make it appear that its chief concern is to believe in God....Such discussions miss the basic religious problem completely. The word God is irrelevant to the religious problem unless the word is used to refer to whatever in truth operates to save man from evil and to the greater good no matter how much this operating reality may differ from all traditional ideas about it." (Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment, pp. 11, 12.)

2 Wieman, The Wrestle of Religion with Truth, p. 14. Underlining mine.

3 Wieman, Religious Experience and Scientific Method, p. 9. Also The Wrestle of Religion with Truth p. 59. Also Matthew Arnold, Literature and Dogma (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1873), God is the eternal power "not ourselves which makes for righteousness," (p. 31 also 32), the "stream of tendency by which all things fulfill the law of their being." (p. 41). "If we want here, as we certainly do want, to have what is admittedly certain and verifiable, we must content ourselves with very little." (p. 42). "We then give the name of God to a certain and admitted reality; this, at least, is an advantage." (p. 43).

question concerns the structure and character of that Something which is "empirically transforming man as he cannot transform himself."[1] Wieman does not think of this Something as supernatural. He is a theological naturalist.[2] But, that Something is to be thought of as "supra-human" in that it "creates the good of the world in a way that man cannot do." This would be true even if man's "powers were magnified to infinity." For, "the infinite increase of his ability would have to be the consequence of the prior working of" that Something.[3] What is needed, therefore, is a practical understanding of that Something which "will not only identify" it "but will also enable us to do something with it" of pragmatic value.[4]

Actually, God, for Wieman, has more the nature of a "character of events" than of a metaphysical something.[5] Indeed, Wieman often substitutes for

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1 Wieman, Intellectual Foundation of Faith, p. 105.
2 Wieman, The Source of Human Good, p. 7.
3 Ibid., p. 76.
4 Ibid., p. 3.
5 Wieman, The Wrestle of Religion with Truth, p. 14. Also Wieman, Religious Experience and Scientific Method, p. 381 where Wieman (in 1926) rather optimistically remarks that "the exact nature of God is still problematical and may be for many years to come." See Alfred North Whitehead, Process and Reality (Cambridge: University Press, 1929), pp. 477-497.

the word "God" such terms as "creativity," the "creative event," "creative process," "creative synthesis," "creative integration," "creative good," and "growth." He simply does not address the force of his thought to the seemingly natural and logically prior question of the cause of creativity. God is to be known by and identified with his acts, his behavior. Just as a human being "can be identified by his behavior and by nothing else" so God must be identified. Indeed, Wieman will "go even further and say every human is his behavior and nothing else." People, like bantam roosters and electricity, "are a certain behavior which the universe displays. The same is true of God." God is a particular kind of behavior in the universe having his own distinguishing characteristics just as other behavior in the universe is distinguished "by calling it Sam Jones."[1]

Understood as creativity, God must be recognized as "the ultimate constitutive structure of

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1 Wieman, The Wrestle of Religion with Truth, p. 62. Underlining mine. Wieman's point is not intended as an appeal to psychological behaviorism.

reality" in that "it is the only order which is logically prior to every other order."[1] Thus, creativity is "metaphysically ultimate because it is logically prior to all other knowledge and experience," and it is "religiously ultimate because it brings forth the greatest human good."[2] But this does not mean that God is to be identified with the whole cosmos. Wieman states emphatically that "God is not the pervading purpose of the cosmic whole. The whole universe is not dominated by any purpose so far as we can discover."[3] It must be affirmed that "God is not everything and everything is not God" because creative good is obviously "less than everything which is going on in the total concrete world."[4] Empirical observation indicates that either there are "many subordinate systems, some more or less antagonistic to the most inclusive

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1 Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment, p. 91. Although he prefers to emphasize their differences, Wieman's thought, at this point, is only verbally different from Paul Tillich's "ground of being," or "power of being," or "being as being itself." p.372f. this paper.

2 By definition. Ibid., p. 92.

3 Wieman, The Growth of Religion, p. 434; also p. 378.

4 Wieman, The Wrestle of Religion with Truth, pp. 187, 188. God's creative love "is not an almighty love." (Wieman, The Growth of Religion, p. 364.)

order," or "it may be that the whole universe displays two or more patterns of behavior, neither of which is more inclusive than the other, but both of which are antagonistic to one another."[1] In either case, since evil is destructive process, it is necessarily parasitic in quality, and therefore logically subordinate. "There can be no evil unless there is first the good."[2]

What then is this creative good? What descriptively can be said about it beyond the formal definition that it "operates in human life with such character and power that it will transform man as he cannot transform himself, saving him from evil and leading him to the best that human life can ever reach, provided he meet the required conditions"?[3] Wieman's answer (on the cosmological level) is that God, as creative process, is "the formation of connections of mutual support, mutual control, and mutual fulfillment between diverse activities of electrons, molecules, cells, organisms,

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1 Wieman, The Wrestle of Religion with Truth, p. 61. See also Whitehead, Religion in the Making, p. 7.
2 Ibid., p. 201.
3 Wieman, "Intellectual Autobiography," The Empirical Theology of Henry Nelson Wieman, ed. by Robert W. Bretall, p. 3.

minds, cultures."[1] Or, more simply, God is "creative synthesis."[2] What is more, since this creative synthesis has the character of *process* rather than that of a once-for-all event, God must be understood as "continuously creative of the emerging present"[3] in that he is the creative synthesis in every situation, in every moment.[4]

The significance of this understanding of God for the question of the meaning of life is that (with special emphasis on the personal, human level) God is the creative process "generating new meanings, integrating them with the old, endowing each event as it occurs with a wider range of reference, molding the life of a man into a more deeply unified totality of meaning."[5] Or, more simply, God is the creative growth and integration of meaning in the world.

Wieman's understanding of "meaning" is developed as part of his description of value. Value

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1 Wieman, The Growth of Religion, p. 326. Underlining mine.
2 Ibid., p. 325.
3 Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment, p. 97.
4 Wieman, The Growth of Religion, pp. 283, 325, 480.
5 Wieman, The Source of Human Good, p. 56. Underlining mine.

is defined as "that *association* between enjoyable activities by which they *support* one another, *enhance* one another, and at a higher level," *have meaning* for and in relation to one another.[1] Thus, in a democratic society, freedom and law *support* one another, preventing the extremes of anarchy and tyranny. "Good food and good conversation" may actually enhance one another insofar as each may "make the other more enjoyable."[2] Swaying trees, the song of birds, and a glimmer in the eastern sky have *meaning* for and in relation to one another in that they tell of a morning breeze and the coming of day.[3] Meaning, therefore, is the "added factor of human appreciation" of the mutual support and enhancement which is the work

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1 Henry Nelson Wieman and Regina Westcott-Wieman, *Normative Psychology of Religion* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1935), p. 46. The quote actually continues "mean one another." Underlining mine.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 47.

3 *Ibid.*

of creative synthesis.[1]

God, as the creative and integrating process in the world, is the "source" and "genesis" of "qualitative meaning."[2] He is this because he is first of all the "formation of connections of mutual support and control" occurring "at all levels, from electrons and atoms and molecules up through cells, vegetables and animals, minds, brotherhoods, cultures and history." The individual human personality is thus "submerged, sustained, and pervaded by this infinitely intricate formation of connections of mutual support between diverse activities" which culminates in the formation of a "sustaining matrix"

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1 Ibid., p. 48. Wieman points out that "one may not enjoy the meaningless activities of pounding nails and sawing boards. But when these activities are so connected with many others that they mean the summer cabin I am building in the woods, they may become highly enjoyable. Very painful activities may become enjoyable in this way. This shows how sacrifice and suffering may be of great value." (Ibid.) This thought is not, therefore, to be mistaken for hedonism because the value does not depend upon the enjoyment, but upon the "connection between activities." Indeed enjoyment "enters into value only when it is the order of connection that is enjoyed, for that alone is the value. When the activity is separated from the connections that give it value, it ceases to be a value whether or not it is enjoyed." (Ibid., p. 49.)

Alfred North Whitehead speaks of "value" as "the created unit of feeling arising out of the specific mode of concretion of the diverse elements." Religion in the Making, p. 90.

2 Wieman, The Source of Human Good, p. 20.

that "works" through and in each human personality "to upbuild and enrich" it.[1] There is thus a "vast, unfathomed ocean of quality"[2] surging beneath the level of man's routine existence, breaking into his consciousness only occasionally through art (intentional medium) or a mystical encounter with ordinary things (unintentional medium).[3]

> So strange and startling, so vivid and rare, so different from the usual meager reach of attention may be this disclosure of quality...that men sometimes are led to think that it is a visitation from a metaphysical realm beyond the real world of temporal experience. They may even speak in their excitement of "eternity erupting into time," whatever that may mean.... The matter actually is much more simple. The quality they feel is really the substance of events..., the ultimate nature of existence.[4]

This occasional deeper plunge into some aspect of the depths of existence is experienced as quality and, when taken cognizance of on the rational level, is apprehended as meaning.

Wieman actually distinguishes between what he calls "intrinsic meaning" (the experience of quality intrinsic to the event itself), and "qualitative

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1 Wieman, The Growth of Religion, p. 377.
2 Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment, p. 84. Also Wieman, The Source of Human Good, p. 176, "the vast, deep structured well of existence infinitely rich in quality."
3 Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment, p. 87.
4 Wieman, The Source of Human Good, pp. 136, 137.

meaning" (wherein the quality intrinsic to the event itself is enriched by virtue of its connection with other events of intrinsic meaning).[1] Thus, the sunset today may be qualitatively richer and more meaningful because I associate it with the sunset I saw last summer by the lake.

> As more events...take on richer content of qualitative meaning as these meanings form a network of interconnective events comprehending all that is happening in the world, this universe becomes spiritual..., more deeply and pervasively meaningful. Events cease to be material things merely and become a language, a prophecy, and a song.[2]

At this point it has become transparent that, for Wieman, there is a difficulty inherent in the framing of the teleological dimension of the question of the meaning of life insofar as that question, in asking God's purpose for man, implies God's being a person with a purpose.[3] When so understood, Wieman believes that "the kind of purpose which some have tried to find in life and in the world generally

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1 Ibid., p. 13.

2 Ibid., p. 23. Wieman lists the following "dimensions of meaning" in human life: "the cognitive, the technological, the aesthetic, the formal, the interpersonal, the adumbrative, and the self-conscious." (Man's Ultimate Commitment, p. 299.)

3 See also Tillich, p.387 f. this paper.

is a kind of 'purpose' which has no existence anywhere."[1] Wieman is simply not impressed by arguments which "insist that God is a person...by saying that we cannot imagine anything superior to personality." He judges such logic to be "tantamount to saying that my imagination [should] dictate to God what deity must be," and observes that "this is precisely what is meant by idolatry."[2]

> What God may have in the way of consciousness or super-consciousness or beyond consciousness, we do not know. We do know...we fall asleep every night in almost complete unawareness of the rhythm of billions of living connections that sustain and refresh and enrich. Why do we think it important to lift our puny little speculations and insist that God must have the sort of viscerally controlled consciousness that we have or else be less than we? Certain facts about God's being and nature we know. Many other facts we do not know. Let us rest on what we know....[3]

Having qualified his understanding of "purpose" by rejecting any suggestion of the personality of God, Wieman is nevertheless able to affirm the actuality of purpose within the structure of his

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1 Wieman, Religious Experience and Scientific Method, p. 155. For a constructive discussion affirming the personality of God see the Gifford Lectures by Clement C.J. Webb, God and Personality (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1918). See also Edgar S. Brightman, A Philosophy of Religion (London: Skeffington & Son, Ltd.), pp. 129 - 135.

2 Wieman, Intellectual Foundation of Faith, pp. 74, 75.

3 Wieman, The Growth of Religion, p. 365.

understanding of creative process. "In this metaphysic the goal of life...is to structure the world so that quality will be more appreciable...by connecting qualities in the form of meanings."[1] This "goal of life of the individual is also the goal of life for society and history."[2] Since "meaning" has been defined as human appreciation of the mutual support and enhancement which is the work of creative synthesis,[3] it follows that the purpose of human life is to appreciate the creative synthesis which is God. This definition, however, is not complete as it stands, for Wieman would add that in addition to appreciating the creative synthesis which is God, man must allow himself to be used by God.

Since Wieman understands God in terms of the nature of events, God must not be conceived as an accumulation of static, platonic ideals. Rather, God, is the "process of emerging ideas, wider brotherhood, higher ideals, richer forms of beauty, and love more profound."[4] Thus, God "operates in

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1 Wieman, The Source of Human Good, p. 304. See also Whitehead, Religion in the Making, p. 87.

2 Ibid., p. 305.

3 See p. 305 this paper.

4 Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment, p. 76. Underlining mine.

ways over and above the plans and purposes of men, bringing forth values men cannot foresee, and often developing connections of mutual support and mutual meaning in spite of, or contrary to, the efforts of men."[1] No simple humanism here. Although a theological naturalist, Wieman sharpens "more than ever the line of demarcation between God and man."[2] For, God may not be identified with any ideal, the creative good with any created good. Indeed, Wieman judges idealism to be at best a pattern of "pleasant dreams with which to beguile the tedium,"[3] and at worst the "beatific vision" inspired by the devil insofar as any "glorious vision of good...refuses to hold itself subject to" the ever emerging demands and challenges of the creative process.[4] It is the creative God and not some created and conceivable

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1 Wieman, Normative Psychology of Religion, p. 52. Thus, Daniel Day Williams likens Wieman's theology to "the spirit of high Calvinism. God's sovereign creativity works amidst the wrecks of time, taking its own absolute direction, plowing up human purposes and institutions, breaking down and rebuilding. Man's one course which will lead out of despair is to open his life completely to this transforming power and to serve God above every created good." "Wieman as a Christian Theologian," The Empirical Theology of Henry Nelson Wieman, ed. by Robert W. Bretall, p. 78.

2 Howard L. Parsons, "The New Reformation," Ibid., p. 120.

3 Wieman, Religious Experience and Scientific Method, p. 281.

4 Wieman, The Source of Human Good, p. 129. Also Religious Experience and Scientific Method, pp. 268, 278.

ideal which we must experience, worship, love and obey.[1] God does not satisfy our wants or ideals but constantly transforms them.[2] He must, therefore, be acknowledges as "functionally transcendent" even if he is not metaphysically so.[3]

The significance of God's being understood as functionally transcendent, creative process for the question of the purpose of human life is that meaning is conceived as an ever emerging creative event. Man may not dictate to this process, but rather must ever and again give himself to it and allow himself to be changed by it. Thus, the purpose of human life is that man should appreciate and allow himself to be used by the creative process of mutual support and enhancement which produces quality and

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1 Wieman, Religious Experience and Scientific Method, p. 275.

2 Unless that want happens to be the wish to be transformed. Wieman, Religious Experience and Scientific Method, p. 217.

3 Wieman, The Source of Human Good, p. 77. Wieman's thought is far from suggesting some doctrine of universal and inevitable progress. He only affirms that "in some one quarter then under consideration this increase is occurring" if the right conditions are met. (Normative Psychology of Religion, p. 49.) Meanwhile, "the forces of destruction are always vast and always busy." (The Growth of Religion, p. 378.)

meaning.[1]

Wieman provides a rather detailed description of how he thinks this creative process (which it is the purpose of man to appreciate and give himself over to) actually works on the human level. In examining this "creative event" it is necessary for the sake of clarity to speak of "four subevents." Any of these subevents, when considered apart from the others does not "constitute the creative event." The creative event can only be said to actually occur when all four are working together. "We will have to describe them separately, but distinctions made for the purpose of analysis must not obscure the unitary, fourfold combination necessary to the creativity."[2]

It should be noted that this entire description is meant to explain in detail how God is working on the human level.[3] Wieman certainly does not wish

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1 This summary of Wieman's thought is strikingly similar to the familiar answer to the first question in the Westminster Shorter Catechism: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever."

2 Wieman, The Source of Human Good, p. 58.

3 Wieman does not hesitate to draw the conclusion that "the appreciable world made richer with quality and meaning by this creative event...is culture." Ibid., p. 68. Underlining mine. See Tillich, p. 422 this paper.

to deny the activity of God on other levels, but he believes that it is only at the human level that God is of vital religious concern for man, and so for theology.[1] At precisely this human level, it is possible, and, indeed, necessary to the religious life of modern man, to state with some degree of scientific accuracy how God, understood as the event of continuously occurring creative synthesis bringing to man's life both quality and meaning, actually works. Both God and man are involved in the "creative event." With particular reference to the activity of God, Wieman uses terms such as "creativity" or "creative process." With special

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1 For Wieman's statement about God on the general cosmological level see p. 304 this paper. Wieman does, however, venture an interesting description of the working of God on the economic level: (1) "God is here because the economic process is the chief way in which human activities are woven into a network of interdependence and mutual support." (2) "Men engage in economic activity to enrich themselves individually...but the fact still remains that production for exchange releases a far greater supply of goods for human living than is possible when each produces only what he himself can consume." (3) God, operative in the economic order, keeps "the cherished values and interests of men bound fast to actual reality...in the actual process of existence." (4) Increase of production and exchange release some of "the time and energy" of man so that "he will be free to put his time and strength into other activities." Normative Psychology of Religion, pp. 531-534.

reference to the experience among men, he speaks of "creative interchange." The two-fold level of commitment is to be presupposed throughout. The four "subevents" which together compose the "creative event" are:

The First Subevent: The first subevent may be described as "emerging awareness of qualitative meaning derived from other persons through communication." The "qualitative meaning" which emerges has already been described as consisting "of actual events so related that each acquires qualities from the others." Any particular individual's experience of the meaningful relation of events would be likely to be very limited in scope were it not for the fact of "words" and human communication. But, because of communication, one individual "can acquire the meanings gathered by a million others," and so, "the miracle happens and creativity breaks free from obstacles which elsewhere imprison its power."[1]

The Second Subevent: The second subevent, necessary to the realization of the creative event and a

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1 Wieman, The Source of Human Good, pp. 58, 59. Wieman speaks of "intuition" as the "creative integration of diverse meanings to form a new, more ample meaning." Ibid., p. 184.

meaningful life on the human level, is the integration of newly emerging meanings "with others previously acquired."[1] This emergence of meaning and integration of meaning "works in a spiral, so to speak. When integration of old meanings form a new meaning, the new one can always be considered the first step leading to a further integration with others, and so on without end."[2] The individual only "becomes more of a personality," and has his "thoughts and feelings...enriched and deepened," when actual integration takes place. It does not happen automatically, and "there is much non-creative communication." This fact points to the religious necessity of some sort of rhythm of community and solitude so that, alone, man "may provide conditions favorable to...[integration's] occurence."[3]

The Third Subevent: The third subevent which

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1 Ibid., p. 38.
2 Ibid., p. 185.
3 Ibid., pp. 59-61. Also p. 332f. this paper. "Religion is what the individual does with his own solitariness." Whitehead, Religion in the Making, p. 6, also pp. 37, 43, 76. For a balanced perspective (with which Whitehead may actually agree, Ibid., pp. 48, 76), see Edgar Primrose Dickie, Revelation and Response (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1938) p. 84 ff.

comprises God's action among men occurs as the consequence of the first two. It is the expanding of "the richness of quality in the appreciable world"[1] and the enlargement of its meaning for the individual by a "new structure of interrelatedness" which incorporates the person himself. When the individual and emerging meaning have been "creatively integrated," then "the individual sees what he could not see before, he feels what he could not feel....There is a range and...a richness of quality...which were not there prior to this transformation."[2] This broadens the individual's horizons and gives him the "ability to encounter creatively defeat, failure, suffering, and prospect of death,"[3] and results in a consequent increase of personal freedom "when freedom means one's ability to absorb any cause acting on oneself in such a way that the consequences resulting from it express the character and fulfill the purpose of the individual himself. The way Socrates died is an example."[4]

The Fourth Subevent: The "widening and deepening

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1 Ibid., p. 58.
2 Ibid., pp. 61, 62.
3 Wieman, Intellectual Foundation of Faith, p. 126.
4 Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment, p. 4.

[of] community between those who participate in the total creative event is the final stage in creative good." This subevent "transforms not only the mind of the individual and his appreciable world but also his relations with those who have participated with him in this occurence."[1] Indeed, for those who provide the conditions, "the creativity of God weaves a web of life creating a community reaching back to the beginning of history, gathering all men into a fellowship...[which also extends] infinitely into the future."[2]

This "creative interchange" is not to be thought of as simply an affair for intellectuals involving information alone. It includes "appreciations, sentiments, hopes, fears, memories, regrets, aspirations, joys, sorrows, hates, loves, pieties, and other features of that vast complex which makes up the total experience of every human being."[3] It embraces the whole broad spectrum which composes abundant human life.

Wieman understands these four subevents, taken together, to comprise a description of how God is

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1 Wieman, The Source of Human Good, p. 64.
2 Wieman, Intellectual Foundation of Faith, p.132.
3 Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment, p. 23.

working among men. Conscious of the fact that these are not the sort of events to which theology generally turns its attention, he is convinced that they are the only events that are of genuine religious significance.[1] The determinative point to grasp in understanding Wieman's exposition is that he thinks of these events as activities which happen to men. True, man must provide the conditions appropriate to the occurence. But, the occurence itself is not something which man does, though he participates in it.

However lacking in traditional religious words his exposition may be, it can be translated into New Testament vocabulary. The four "subevents" taken together comprise a description of "creative interchange" or the communion of saints, which, while dependent upon "the required conditions" or faith, is itself the work of "creative process" or the Holy Spirit. Indeed, Wieman believes that "when thus operative in its sovereignty," the process of creative good is identical with "the risen and the living Christ."[2] It is therefore

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1 Wieman, Intellectual Foundation of Faith, p. 77.
2 Wieman, The Source of Human Good, p. 60.

"the actual reality mythically represented by the transcendental metaphysics of traditional Christianity."[1]

The teleological dimension of the question of the meaning of life - the question concerning God's purpose for man - may be answered in the following statement: The purpose of human life is that man should appreciate and allow himself to be transformed and used by the creative process of mutual support and enhancement which produces quality and meaning, and which is operative in human life in the four-fold event of creative interchange.[2]

III

It should be apparent at this point that Wieman's answer to the teleological dimension of the primary question has a certain tautological character. The meaning of life is the growth of meaning. This is just the form as well as the substance of the conclusion which Wieman comes to when, in Man's Ultimate

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1 Ibid., p. 265.

2 According to Wieman the "meaningless" state is itself meaningful insofar as it motivates to drive beyond established patterns of meaning in openness to the creative growth of meaning in the ever emerging present. Religious Experience and Scientific Method, p. 362.

Commitment, he defines the meaning of life and history as "the progressive creation and integration of meaning in all the dimensions of meaning."[1] And yet, Wieman's thought transcends simple tautology because of his understanding of the unique character of man. "Meaning" is the appreciation of the continuously emerging structure of mutually supporting and enhancing events. Man is the creature whose unique character consists in his ability to appreciate and be transformed by this meaning-ful process. His "manhood" is comprised in this fact: that he may become a unique, living appreciator of and contributor to quality and meaning, and thus an individual person.[2] Wieman is therefore able to conclude that the meaning of life "is the creation of meaning; and this is identical with the creation of man" (when "man" is understood in his uniqueness, and not simply as a biological entity).[3]

If, however, the meaning of man's life consists in continuous appreciation of and transformation by the process of emerging meaning which gives him a

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1 p. 300.
2 Wieman, The Wrestle of Religion with Truth, pp. 195, 196.
3 Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment, p. 300.

meaning-ful individuality, then how does the individual man go about meeting the "required conditions" which will make that appreciation and transformation an actual event in his own life? This is the vocational dimension of the primary question. How does the individual actually find and achieve his place within the context of the general or teleological answer?[1]

Wieman's answer to the vocational dimension of the question of the meaning of life is both logical (within the structure of his thought) and precise: A man must (1) seek after "a kind of work which enables [him] to give his strength to producing some of the conditions required for the creative transformation of man," and, in doing so, he must (2) discover work which "is fitted to [his] own aptitude, thus enabling [him] to exercise all his powers to the maximum in doing it."[2] When this has been said a great deal remains to be said.

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1 Wieman, acknowledging the significance of the question in just the form here asked, writes: "Now we come to a question about the individual: What can I myself do about it?... What can this particular individual, my own self, contribute to the vast undertaking involved in our answer to the primary question?" (Man's Ultimate Commitment, p. 285.)

2 Ibid., p. 291.

But, everything else to be said follows from this formal statement.

Wieman believes that "man is made not for human life as it is but for the creativity which transforms life."[1] "This creativity gives the maximum meaning to his existence."[2] Indeed, "serving the creative event" is "the supreme vocation of human history," and "there is nothing else to be done that is worthy of man."[3] However, just because that for which man is called to live is the creativity which transforms human life continuously, man must never approach his reasonable service with predetermined desires and ideals. Otherwise, he will not, in fact, be serving, and will certainly "miss most of this unpredictable, unforeseen, emergent fullness of value" which is the rightful reward of those who sacrifice their own will to the will of God.[4] And the will of God is

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1 Ibid., p. 73.
2 Wieman, Intellectual Foundation of Faith, p. 91.
3 Wieman, The Source of Human Good, pp. 74, 75.
4 Wieman, The Growth of Religion, p. 283. Also p. 290 this paper. Wieman warns that "A parent may be devoted to the ideal possibilities of his child... but not to the actual living child except as the latter is raw material out of which to shape his ideals. (Ibid., p. 288.)

always the previously indeterminable "creative synthesis of each unique situation."[1]

This does not mean, however, that man is called to a merely passive role in human history. Indeed, for Wieman, it means just the opposite. For man to yield himself to the creative process means to become so subject to transforming power that there will result a consequent reorganization of human society and history. When man becomes subject to continuous reconstruction in the depths of his own personality, he simultaneously becomes responsible for the reconstruction of the social and historical dimensions of his life.[2] Thus, Wieman can speak of moving "from the ages of drift to the ages of direction."[3] Increased social awareness has brought us to the point where this has become a necessity. "Man must assume responsibility for shaping his own history," while continuing under the discipline and rule of creative process.[4] Wieman does not mean that men should control history "in the sense of determining the course of future events." But, he

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1 Ibid., p. 283.
2 Wieman, Intellectual Foundation of Faith, p. 8.
3 Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment, p. 46.
4 Wieman, Normative Psychology of Religion, p. 519.

does mean that man "must assume responsibility for maintaining social conditions under which creative transformation of the mind can occur to the measure required to deal constructively with the complexities and problems of a world community."[1] Man is responsible for maintaining the conditions which will permit the creative process to work most freely and most fully. Then, the creative process itself (God) will give direction to human history. The new understanding of others and the new possibilities which arise from the event of creative interchange must then come to concrete expression in the social and historical process.

Wieman actually lists five recognizable periods in the development of human history.[2] The first of these periods is that in which primitive competence with language permitted primitive man to evolve a primitive society. The second period is marked by the development of "civilization," which is characterized by the extension of the "range of time and

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1 Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment, p. 276.

2 Wieman defines history as "the present in so far as it has been shaped by the past. It is the past in so far as it continues to operate in the present." Ibid., p. 267. He indicates his indebtedness to Karl Jaspers. See, The Origin and Goal of History (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1953).

space over which interchange and accumulation can occur," and is made possible by writing. The third period is marked by "a creative transformation of the psyche which made [man] aware of [his] capacity for transformation beyond any known limit, both toward greater good and toward evil." It happened roughly between 800 B.C. and 200 B.C. The fourth period is marked by the emergence of science and technology which enable man to secure "the environmental conditions needed to undergo creative transformation...beyond the present state of human existence." The fifth period is the one we are now entering. It is marked by the "change in institutions and action of individuals which will bring into the lives of many people that higher dominance of creativity which in the past has occurred only in the lives of a few."[1]

The importance of this brief summary of Wieman's understanding of the developing stages of history is

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1 Ibid., pp. 302-304. Wieman notes that "the much lauded progress brought on by scientific method" in itself "fails to create in us an ever richer and fuller system of wants." (Religious Experience and Scientific Method, p. 238.) See also Wieman, The Directive in History (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1949), a short work of 134 pages which contains little which is not dealt with more extensively elsewhere.

that it clarifies what Wieman believes to be the important aspects of the work of creative process in our time, and thus points to where the individual is likely to find the most constructive and meaningful vocational and religious possibilities. It thus points to the first half of Wieman's answer to the vocational dimension of the question of the meaning of life by describing in general terms the kind of task to which a man may meaningfully lend his strength - the reorganization and transformation of the structures and institutions of society which will permit meaning-ful creative interchange to extend and expand ever more universally.

But, how does the individual person actually fit into all of this? Wieman speaks of man's "initial guilt" as his "refusing to decide what [he] shall live for," and describes such guilt as "the guilt of ignoring the question: What should be the ruling aim of my existence."[1] When the general theological answer to this question has been described (as above), this further problem remains. It is the problem of adequacy. For, men find that

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1 Ibid., p. 14.

even when they know God's call "they cannot commit themselves completely and perfectly....Always and to some degree they are unfaithful in the depths and complexities of the total self."[1] How, then, does a man actually discover and achieve his own individual role? This is the importance of the second half of Wieman's answer to the vocational dimension of the question of the meaning of life. Few major theologians on the contemporary scene give so much consideration to this practical religious question.[2]

Just because man's predicament is such that there always lurks a degree of unfaithfulness "in the depths and complexities of the total self,"[3] the question of genuine religion takes on its true significance. The "uniquely religious" experience is that "reorganisation of the total personality" which ever and again unites the self with the process of creative synthesis in such a way that "a

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1 Ibid., p. 15.

2 See for example, Methods of Private Religious Living (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929). Another contemporary theologian with such practical concern is Nels F.S. Ferre; see Making Religion Real (London: Collins, 1956).

3 Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment, p. 15.

new meaning and purpose in living" results.[1] "All the good which human life may ever attain will be reached only by adjustment to facts as they are, and predominantly to the ultimately and critically important facts....The energy and warmth and illumination of electricity become available for the good of human life only when right adjustment is made to them."[2] How is this possible for the individual? What are the "required conditions" which must be met if man is to be transformed as he cannot transform himself, be delivered from evil and advanced in the direction of greatest good?

It is in response to this question that Wieman reveals a truly "high" doctrine of the church - not, of course, as an institution, but as a phenomenon operative redemptively in the life of mankind. He suggests the following four aspects of the church's function:[3]

1. Worship through ritual and symbol: The purpose of ritual and symbol is to encourage direct

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1 Wieman, Religious Experience and Scientific Method, p. 224.
2 Wieman, The Wrestle of Religion with Truth, p. 130. Underlining mine.
3 Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment, p. 172.

acquaintance with God beyond the cognitive level. "To worship means to become wholly attentive to God, i.e. to subject oneself to that total mass of stimulation which is playing upon one all the time but to which one is not responsive save in worship."[1] No task of the church, including the theological task, is so important as this. "It is neglect of religious experience as such which is our chief danger in this age of scientific method."[2] Through worship a man is able to (1) "develop radically new meanings," (2) return to "old meanings with new freshness and vigor," (3) be freed temporarily from "the binding tension of constraint of established meanings," and (4) enrich his "sense of the concrete fullness of experience underlying [individual] meanings by dipping into that stream of total event to which

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1 Wieman, Religious Experience and Scientific Method, p. 248. Wieman writes that "the mystic at his best is the midwife struggling with immediate experience to bring new meaning to birth." Ibid., p. 343. Underlining mine.

2 Ibid., p. 41.

all our meanings must ultimately refer."[1] Wieman actually suggests three stages necessary for truly fruitful worship. There must first be exposure to God as described above. But, such exposure must serve some creative purpose. The second stage in worship is, therefore, diagnosis, involving the recognition of inadequate adjustments and subsequent confession. All of this is meant to lead to the third stage of worship which is reconstruction, in which a man positively and constructively chooses and commits himself to new possibilities and programs for his personal and social life.[2]

2. To encourage creative solitude, self-examination and prayer: Self-examination is not something of

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1 Ibid., p. 324. Wieman actually speaks of a need for "proletarian art," by which he means not "promoting propaganda (although it may do this incidentally), but...awakening among industrial workers who operate our technology those interactions which create the subrational matrix of culture, thereby leading them to assume responsibility for the social order and the good of all human living. This they will do, not because they understand the good of all human living (no one does), but because their lives are directed to this end at levels which understanding cannot reach....Men who scorn such art because it is not great in some other sense are irresponsible snobs and parasites." Source of Human Good, p. 151, 152.

2 Wieman, The Wrestle of Religion with Truth, pp. 71-76.

which the self is capable alone. Worship is a necessary prerequisite. Furthermore, the kind of creative interchange which the community life of the church provides is also a factor necessary to thorough self examination. Indeed, "only by creative interchange is it possible for the individual to become self-critical and self-esteeming because in this way he learns what others think of him and thus becomes conscious of himself."[1] Creative solitude needs the church community, and is dependent upon it[2] because "community makes the individual."[3] Yet, it is ultimately through solitary meditation and prayer that transformation becomes operative. In its final stages "religious experience must be a solitary achievement."[4] This points to the desirability of some sort of balance or rhythm between community and private worship.[5]

Self-examination, reconstruction and transformation are climaxed in prayer. Wieman gives

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1 Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment, p. 28.
2 Wieman, The Source of Human Good, p. 60.
3 Wieman, Growth of Religion, p. 269.
4 Wieman, The Wrestle of Religion with Truth, p. 209. Wieman refers to A.N. Whitehead, "Religion is what a man does with his solitude." The Source of Human Good, p. 61.
5 Wieman, The Source of Human Good, p. 60.

extensive theological consideration to prayer. "How prayer works can be known only as we see what the God is to whom it is directed."[1] "God," is to be understood as "the natural process of growth of meaning and value" as already defined.[2] "The individual person who prays is one who lives and moves and has his being in a system of connections that are ever forming and re-forming, losing and regaining, and...all his life and its fulfilment are the work of these."[3] As previously mentioned, "the consciousness of the individual is like a tiny periscope which rises above [this] vast ocean of sustaining reality." Consequently, "the personality is...woven into an enormously vast system which works for the most part outside the scope of its own consciousness."[4] Prayer, is to be understood as "that voluntarily established attitude of the personality which enables connections of value to grow far beyond the scope of ordinary instrumentalities of consciousness,"[5] but which will in turn

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1 Wieman, Growth of Religion, p. 376.
2 Ibid. Also p. 305 this paper.
3 Ibid., p. 378.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid., p. 380.

"support and enrich the personality" to such an extent that "God can work more potently in the world than would otherwise be possible."[1] The individual who would discover his own particular relationship to the growth of meaning in the world must make that discovery in prayer.[2]

3. Social reinforcement: The church functions as an "assembly for social reinforcement."[3] It thereby lends breadth and strength to the call to meaning which a man receives in prayer. In other men who are also seeking to relate themselves to the growth of meaning in the world the individual finds "that deepening and contagion of commitment which results from people practicing together a common devotion."[4] The church further enhances all individual experiences of meaning by being the community of creative interchange. "You express your whole self and

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1 Ibid., p. 379. Wieman suggests that "in prayer one is talking to himself. But he is not praying to himself because the prayer is not the words....The words have no power over God. The words have power only over oneself. But the prayer does have power with God." Ibid.

2 Of course, prayer, like God and the whole of reality, has "process" character. It is never "established once for all," but must be recurrent, like eating and sleeping and all activities which are in sustaining relation to the vital needs of human existence." Ibid., p. 335.

3 Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment, p. 172.

4 Ibid.

your entire mind freely and fully and deeply and truly to other persons who understand you most completely and appreciatively with joy in what you are as so expressed,"[1] and you respond in kind. Indeed, the church is this community in which individuals "inform one another of the difficulties which stand in the way of...devotion...., and wherein they cooperatively strive to overcome these difficulties."[2] "This sense of being profoundly appreciated and understood and this capacity to appreciate and understand the other,...this is what saves man."[3] This is not to suggest that man saves man. But, creative interchange is the means of grace through which God saves man.[4]

4. To provide religious education: The church is able to help the individual discover his personal relationship to the growth of meaning in the world by being a basis for inquiry and a source of creative instruction "concerning the nature and demands of...commitment," and concerning the creative and

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1 Ibid., p. 23.
2 Wieman, Growth of Religion, p. 269.
3 Wieman, Intellectual Foundation of Faith, p. 53.
4 Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment, pp. 16, 178.

meaning-ful process which "commands the commitment."[1] It can, furthermore, provide factual information concerning the specific and most likely possibilities through which the individual may meaning-fully unite his life with the creative source of meaning, and constructively use his strength in the service of the growth of meaning. It will therefore particularly direct his attention to the reorganisation and transformation of social structures and institutions as the area of major growth of creative meaning in our day.[2] This task of religious education is one of the most pressing needs of our time.[3]

Wieman believes that these four functions of the church - worship through ritual and symbol so as to encourage direct religious experience; the encouragement of creative solitude through self-

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1 Ibid., p. 172.

2 See p. 327 this paper.

3 Wieman speaks out boldly in favor of a "rudimentary kind of religion" to be taught in public schools in the United States. He does not mean by this to impose an elaboration of symbols, but to "establish as central" a "commitment to creative interchange." (Man's Ultimate Commitment, pp. 189, 190.) He conceives his own work to be a constructive "attempt to cooperate in this task," and warns that unless such basic and "rudimentary" religion is incorporated in the public school curriculum, "it will become increasingly difficult to make the child feel the importance of that which is excluded from the schools." The Wrestle of Religion with Truth, pp. 26, 27.

examination and prayer; the social reinforcement and creative interchange that can only come from and with people of similar commitment; and adequate religious education - provide precisely what is needed in order to help a man become so transformed that his life can be constructively united with the creative growth of meaning in the modern world. Through the church (understood as described above) a man discovers his own individual answer to the vocational dimension of the question of the meaning of life.

IV

The answer to the social or ethical dimension of the question of the meaning of life - what is the meaning of the individual's life for and in relation to the life of his neighbor? - is such an integral part of the whole structure of Wieman's thought that it is everywhere presupposed. For, when God is understood as the process in the universe creating "connections of mutual support, mutual control and mutual fulfillment between diverse activities of electrons, molecules, cells, organisms, minds, cultures," then it becomes obvious

that the meaning of the individual's life for and in relation to his neighbor is one of participation in that "mutual support, mutual control and mutual fulfillment"[1] which composes society.

What is more, because the way in which man "participates" in this meaningful activity is through the four-fold event of creative interchange with his neighbor,[2] it follows that man's morality actually consists in those forms of conduct "required for interchange of interests, for integration of these in the life of each, for expansion of the appreciable world, and for the deepening of community."[3] "There is always one changeless and absolute imperative: Always act to provide the conditions most favorable for creative interchange."[4]

Man should undertake this responsibility for

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1 Wieman's use of the term "control" is a bit stronger than his actual intention. "Influence" would perhaps be more adequate.

2 See p.316 f. this paper.

3 Wieman, The Source of Human Good, p. 223.

4 Wieman, "Reply to Parsons," The Empirical Theology of Henry Nelson Wieman, p. 139. "Creative interchange provides the standard for judging what is good and what is evil in human life. The good is what sustains, promotes or favors the creation of appreciative understanding between individuals and peoples. The evil is what hinders or prevents this kind of interchange." Man's Ultimate Commitment, p. 25.

providing the conditions appropriate for creative interchange because it is through such interchange that life becomes meaningful for both himself and the neighbor. The individual is a bearer of meaning, and as he participates in creative interchange he not only receives and experiences new meaning but also contributes new meaning. Thereby emerges a support and enhancement of meaning for the individual which does not belong to the individual himself, but only to him by virtue of his participation with his neighbor.

In a very real sense the ethical dimension of the primary question may be said to focus most clearly upon Wieman's chief concern. In an autobiographical essay he describes how his attention has gradually shifted from a concern about the activity of God in the universe as a whole to the more limited but more important concern about how God operates in human life.[1] "Beliefs about the... character of the totality of all existence...are evasive devices which direct human concern away

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1 Wieman, "Intellectual Autobiography," The Empirical Theology of Henry Nelson Wieman, p. 4.

from...human life."[1] Whereas, in fact, it is "in human life, in the actual processes of human existence, [that there] must be found the saving and transforming power which religious inquiry seeks and which faith must apprehend."[2] Wieman's whole understanding of history,[3] and particularly his understanding of the present stage of history as the age for reorganization and transformation of social institutions so as to allow the growth of meaning to extend more universally, gives some indication of how the ethical and human relational pervades every dimension of his thought. Indeed, it would have been possible to interpret the whole of Wieman's answer to the question of the meaning of life in terms of the ethical dimension.

Man discovers the meaning of his life for and in relation to the life of his neighbor as he participates with his neighbor in the four-fold event of creative interchange. Through this event his life

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1 Wieman, as quoted by Huston Smith, "Empiricism Revived," The Empirical Theology of Henry Nelson Wieman, p. 250.

2 Wieman, "Intellectual Autobiography," The Empirical Theology of Henry Nelson Wieman, p. 4. Also Wieman, Intellectual Foundation of Faith, p. 105.

3 See p.326 f.this paper.

and the life of his neighbor become meaningfully related, supported and enhanced.

V

What is the meaning of life in the perspective of death? Does not death cancel the very possibility of life having any meaning? This ultimate or eschatological dimension of the question of the meaning of life is one which Wieman answers with what could possibly be described, in his own vocabulary, as "creative courage." Since the empirical presuppositions of his thought will not permit speculation concerning life beyond death, Wieman is compelled to deal with the problem by suggesting a creative, and therefore positive interpretation of what appears to be the ultimate negativity. His approach to the problem can be described by the framing of a question: can death itself (understood as finis) be a meaning-ful event and serve the advancement of meaning? His answer to this question is, of course, "yes."[1] "Death...makes creativity possible."[2] The actual content of this understanding

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1 Wieman, Growth of Religion, p. 319.
2 Wieman, "Reply to Williams," The Empirical Theology of Henry Nelson Wieman, p. 106.

is a consistent conclusion within the highly systematic structure of Wieman's thought.

What is the meaning of life in the perspective of death? Wieman finds nothing but scorn for those who suggest that all is meaningless unless life continues and the triumph of good is considered assured. Such affirmations of "overbelief, held against the evidence"[1] are, in fact, "a confession that one has become addicted to the drug and cannot live without it."[2] True health in the inner-man demands an honest facing of the "dark realities" of life.[3]

> The awareness of evil is not [itself] evil, on the contrary it is one of the supreme goods because only when one is fully cognizant of it can he act intelligently toward it. More important still, only when one allows evil to enter awareness in the fulness of its reality can one experience most fully the most precious realities in love and beauty in creativity of all kinds. No one can think, feel, and act with his whole self if a part of himself must be deadened or suppressed to exclude from his consciousness what the whole self experiences....

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1 Wieman, The Source of Human Good, p. 88.

2 Ibid., p. 89. Wieman is in constant polemics with Niebuhr and Tillich. "Whoever in despair appeals beyond history betrays the holy cause for which we fight, for here in time it must be lost or won." (Ibid., p. 309.) "Beyond history" is a favorite term of Niebuhr's. Wieman is, of course, asking that what Niebuhr intends as symbolic language be given purely cognitive force.

3 Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment, p. 62.

> To release the full power and passion of the total self one must face up to all the realities which are truly present in the form of truths and meanings and concrete existence.[1]

Wieman wishes to take seriously the implications for theology of the second law of thermodynamics[2] in which the universe "in its greatest cosmic dimension" is understood to be getting progressively cooler with its "dynamic energy...flowing down to a dead level," so that "it cannot be used for the upward thrust of creative advance."[3] He does not believe, however, that this scientific conclusion bears the weight of absolute finality, since all scientific conclusions have a tentative nature, and necessarily exclude from consideration the unpredictable possibilities which creativity may develop in man and in the universe in the future.[4] Nevertheless,

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1 Ibid., pp. 62, 76. Wieman has no time for what he judges to be continental existentialism's unconstructive preoccupation with death. This is a "subtle and dishonest trick by which the mind evades ...responsible action." Ibid., p. 63.

2 See also Karl Heim, p. 188 this paper.

3 Wieman, The Source of Human Good, p. 108.

4 Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment, p. 272; Growth of Religion, p. 321; The Source of Human Good, p. 108. Wieman believes "there is much more reason to believe that creativity will save man at the last than there is reason to believe in divine intervention in any other form." (Man's Ultimate Commitment, p. 273.) Nevertheless, he warns, "if this is to be the final doom then no mere belief can make it otherwise." Wieman's position is that "commitment" may make it otherwise.

empirical theology must only recognise, and not build upon these possibilities. "In any case we have millions of years to go. The way of life for us remains the same whatever the outcome may be."[1] Man must seek "ultimate peace" not in the form of some desperately hoped for but imaginary "belief assuring us of final success and glory whether in history or beyond," but rather "by giving [himself] quite completely to the best there is in all being, no matter what hazard of ultimate destruction may be involved," and no matter how much final success may be in doubt.[2] Then,

> suppose it does come. Still...men will have conquered death with God up to that point.... It will still be a fact that on this planet God took on existence to this degree. It will still be a fact that on this tiny granule in the universe was an actualisation of precious value. It was superbly worth all it cost, tender and beautiful and tragic as it was....[3]

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1 Wieman, The Source of Human Good, p. 108.
2 Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment, p. 273.
3 Wieman, Growth of Religion, p. 321. Daniel Day Williams notes, and Wieman would probably agree, that "what he says on the question of fulfillment in history...[is] something of a blend of utopianism and the tragic vision." "Wieman as a Christian Theologian," The Empirical Theology of Henry Nelson Wieman, p. 88. See also Max Otto, "The Hunger for Cosmic Support," Things and Ideals (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1925), Chapter XII.

I can be kind
   Although I know
The gods are blind
   And planets go
Untended, lost,
   On chartless gyres
Of lifeless frost
   And lawless fires

I dare be kind
   Although I know
The clanging, blind
   Eternal snow
Shall swell from out
   The dark at length
In undevout
   Indifferent strength,

And each by each
   Our planets fold
In tranquil reach,
   Of level cold.[1]

Wieman believes that any attempt to opt out of responsibility - claiming that life is meaningless without the assurance of immortality and ultimate victory - is a betrayal of both man and God. "To say that we should not give ourselves in ultimate commitment to...creativity because it might not go on forever, or might never prevail over counter processes, is like saying one should never love with the whole heart because love can fail....He who cowers through life like that is unfit for

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1 Part of an unpublished poem by Donald Carey Williams, professor of philosophy at Harvard University as quoted in Wieman, The Source of Human Good, pp. 108, 109.

human existence."[1]

The facts are that "no one knows what happens to the individual after death."[2] We do, however, know what we must do if we are "to face triumphantly the great destroyer." We must "commit ourselves absolutely into the keeping of...creative power. We could not do more than this if we knew with complete certainty everything that might happen."[3] Then, "if creative transformation cannot carry the individual into a glory beyond this world, there is a glory to be wrought on this earth by death creatively met."[4] Thus, the full weight of Wieman's answer to the question of the meaning of life in the perspective of death is concerned with this possibility; that death itself may be a meaningful event creatively met, thus advancing the growth of meaning.

As might be expected, Wieman makes reference to the deaths of Socrates and Jesus.[5] It is one

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1 Wieman, Intellectual Foundation of Faith, p.103.
2 Wieman, The Source of Human Good, p. 299. "Concerning salvation...beyond this world an empiricist has nothing to say." Randolph Crump Miller, "Wieman's Theological Empiricism," The Empirical Theology of Henry Nelson Wieman, p. 27.
3 Wieman, The Source of Human Good, p. 280.
4 Ibid.
5 Wieman, Growth of Religion, p. 319.

of the signs of personal religious growth that the individual experiences the increased "ability to absorb any cause acting on...[himself] in such a way that the consequences resulting from it express the character and fulfill the purpose of the individual himself."[1] When man is totally committed to the creative source of good, then, "death...is itself made a servant of that cause and so is transformed from a foe to a helper."[2] Death, as a biological event, has the "true significance" that it makes the ongoing process of life in this world possible.[3] Without it, mankind would have long ago increased to such numbers that humanity as a whole would have by now necessarily ceased. Therefore, man must "accept death as a gift of God," and respond by offering up "his life in its wholeness, including his death," in order to open "the way to the triumph of creative good" in history.[4] If this is man's final tragedy it is also

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1 Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment, p. 4. Also p. 318 this paper. There are many tragic deaths for which it is difficult to see how this possibility applies.

2 Wieman, Growth of Religion, pp. 319, 320.

3 Wieman, "Reply to Williams," The Empirical Theology of Henry Nelson Wieman, p. 108.

4 Ibid., p. 108.

his ultimate glory - to serve and offer himself to the process which created him and which he acknowledges to be greater than himself.[1]

Man must, therefore, commit himself "in the wholeness of his finitude."[2] This includes "his weakness, his failures, his guilt, his death." "Often these negative qualities when freely and openly acknowledged and given as a part of his total self in devotion can render greater service than what one thinks to be his strength and virtue."[3] That he may not see the "success" of his commitment is obvious. All of the concrete objectives of his life may be "shattered and [lie] in ruins."[4] But this does not mean that man has "no recourse in such a time," or that his life has been meaningless. Indeed, he may experience meaning, "a flow of full quality," yet more deeply amid the ruins.[5] "It is said of Jesus that in the garden of Gethsemane, after he had struggled with the problem of his life,

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1 "Whoever experiences, appreciates and loves supremely...partakes of eternal life" in a qualitative sense. Wieman, Growth of Religion, p. 321.
2 Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment, p. 292.
3 Ibid.
4 Wieman, "Reply to Parsons," The Empirical Theology of Henry Nelson Wieman, p. 135.
5 Ibid. Underlining mine.

angels came and ministered to him. But that is only a way of referring to something which is beyond the reach of words." It is the experience of creativity operative "at that stage where the new structure is not sufficiently developed to be apprehended by a concept nor followed as a course of action."[1] Nevertheless, that very creativity is able to redeem tragedy and render the apparently meaningless full of meaning.

> The creativity of God weaves a web of life creating a community reaching back to the beginning of history, gathering all men into a fellowship of communication and extending indefinitely into the future. This divine creativity is forming a community out of all the ages of history. In this community the unknown dead speak to the present and the present speaks to the unknown future. In this community all the generations of men, living and dead, speak to one another. This [community] is the meaning of history."[2]

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1 Ibid., p. 136.

2 Wieman, Intellectual Foundation of Faith, p.132. This may be considered Wieman's latest (1961) judgement on the matter. But see Man's Ultimate Commitment, p. 288 where, in 1958 his argument appears contrary. This 1958 view is probably the more "empirical" conclusion, though the 1961 view is actually a return to his early appreciation of Whitehead, who described God's "subjective aim" as being "that of a tender care that nothing be lost." See A.N. Whitehead, Process and Reality, (Cambridge: University Press, 1929), p. 490. See also Wieman's appreciation of Whitehead's earlier works Religion in the Making and Science and the Modern World in The Wrestle of Religion with Truth, pp. 179-213.

"Human destiny" does, indeed, extend "beyond the horizon of what we are able to imagine...."[1] But this must not be interpreted as implying that "we are pilgrims...to another world beyond the skies nor to any supernatural realm." Rather, man is called to "the continuous remaking of the world" in obedient commitment to creativity.[2] Here is the validity of the traditional eschatological symbols. "Human life as now lived is unstable and transitional to a level of being not yet reached."[3] Its ultimate goal is the "Kingdom of God" - "a world so transformed that every part responds with rich delivery of meaning to every other part and supremely to the spirit of man."[4] But, we have no *a priori* "guarantee that this breakthrough will occur."[5] Nothing short of ultimate

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1 Wieman, *Man's Ultimate Commitment*, p. 75.
2 *Ibid.*
3 *Ibid.*, p. 51.
4 Wieman, *The Source of Human Good*, p. 272.
5 Niebuhr is able to scorn Wieman's latent "optimism" regarding human possibilities in history in the name of "realism," by which he means that Wieman does not take the actual ambiguities of man's sinfulness seriously. (See Reinhold Niebuhr, *Faith and History*, p. 79.) But Wieman counters that "this 'realism' helps to conceal /Niebuhr's/ romantic optimism on ultimate issues." (*The Source of Human Good*, p. 88.) Pessimism concerning the possibilities of actual history is due to faith in and commitment to "what does *not* operate in human history to support the hope of a growing good...." (Wieman, "Reply to Williams," *The Empirical Theology of Henry Nelson Wieman*, p.109.)

commitment to the creative source of meaning, "with searching self-criticism,...confession and repentance of the sin of not meeting the conditions required for [creative] interchange, will save us."[1]

VI

Wieman's answer to the question of the meaning of life is summarized by the following points:

I. The proper subject matter for theology is clarified when an observation is made and a question is asked. The observation concerns man's capacity for undergoing radical transformation either in the direction of cruelty and misery or of saintly virtue and blessedness. The question which emerges from this observation is: What can transform man in such a way as to save him from the depths of evil and bring him to the greatest good, when he meets the required conditions? Religious inquiry is misdirected when seeking a transcendental reality or involved in metaphysical speculation. It must be concerned with that which in fact saves man

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1 Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment, pp. 51, 52.

from evil and brings him to good. Therefore, religious truth must be discovered and tested by the same methods by which any truth is attained, and theology must be empirical.

II. God, considered on the cosmological level, is the creative process forming connections of mutual support, mutual control, and mutual fulfillment between diverse activities of electrons, molecules, cells, organisms, minds, and cultures - or, more simply, God is creative synthesis.

III. "Meaning" refers to the human appreciation of the work of creative synthesis. Therefore, God, considered with special reference to human, personal existence, is the creative process generating new meanings, integrating them with the old, endowing each event as it occurs with a wider range of reference, molding the life of a man into a more deeply unified totality of meaning - or, God is the creative growth and integration of meaning in the world.

IV. The creative growth of meaning in the world may be observed and defined by reference to four "sub-

events": (1) the emerging awareness of quality and meaning derived from interchange with other persons of interests and concerns meaningful for them; (2) the integration of newly emerging meanings with others previously acquired; (3) the expansion of quality in the world by the transformation and incorporation of the person himself; (4) the widening and deepening of community between those who participate in the creative event.

V. The purpose of human life is that man should appreciate and allow himself to be transformed and used by the creative process of mutual support and enhancement which produces quality and meaning, and which is operative in human life in the four-fold event of creative interchange.

VI. The church helps the individual realize meaning by: (1) encouraging direct religious experience through worship, ritual, and symbol; (2) encouraging creative solitude, self-examination and prayer; (3) providing the social reinforcement and creative interchange which can only come from and with people of similar commitment; (4) providing adequate religious education. Through these the

individual may become so transformed that his life is constructively united with the creative growth of meaning in the world.

VII. The frontier for the growth of meaning in the present age is the reorganization and transformation of the structures and institutions of society which will permit meaningful creative interchange to extend and expand ever more universally. For, the meaning of the individual's life for and in relation to the life of his neighbor is realized in the encouragement of and participation in the kind of activity which will meaningfully relate, support, enhance and fulfill his life and the life of his fellows.

VIII. Confronted by death, theology must not indulge in "overbelief, held against the evidence." Attention must be turned to understanding death as a meaning-ful event, which through commitment to the source of human good can be creatively met, and which will thereby advance the growth of meaning. Death can thus be made a servant.

There are many questions - Is Wieman's God really empirical? Is an empirical God really God?

Does not Wieman's answer to the eschatological dimension of the primary question betray the bankruptcy of naturalistic-empiricism to deal with ultimate issues? What about the testimony of the saints concerning the personal (and not just qualitative) character of the divine-human encounter? etc. - which theologians from practically every position on the theological spectrum[1] find it necessary to ask of a theological naturalist such as Wieman. Certainly his positivistic-empiricist approach to theology represents an extreme within modern thought. However, it is just Wieman's insistence upon radical revision of the theological tradition which clarifies issues sufficiently to allow precise and pointed questions to be asked, questions which are in turn always given well defined answers.

Wieman's answer to the question of the meaning of life is a case in point. Whether or not his answer is found to be finally satisfying (a matter which can not be decided apart from personal

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1 These theologians are practically all represented, and practically all of the questions are asked in the Festschrift: The Empirical Theology of Henry Nelson Wieman, edit. by Robert W. Bretall. N.Y.

conviction), it has much of the "force of evidence," and the comprehensiveness which have been to varying degrees lacking in the several theologians previously considered. Wieman's entire approach to theology guards him against the kind of dogmatism which gives Barth's answer a certain arbitrary character.[1] Unlike Bultmann and to a lesser extent Heim, Wieman finds no difficulty in tracing the hand of God operative in and giving meaning and direction to history. Highly informed by natural science, he sees God meaningfully operative in the natural world.[2] Furthermore, he has undertaken a highly suggestive description of what "meaning" - as the human appreciation of the divine, quality producing

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1 Wieman, of course, has a highly apparent dogmatism of his own, but it can hardly be called "arbitrary" - it is more epistemological and philosophical, in keeping with the thought of the times.

2 Wieman has seen clearly the relation of nature and history to the question of the meaning of life. Note also Whitehead: "In its solitariness the spirit asks, What, in the way of value, is the attainment of life? And it can find no such value till it has merged its individual claim with that of the objective universe. Religion is world-loyalty." Religion in the Making, p. 49. Also, "Religion is the longing of the spirit that the facts of existence should find their justification in the nature of existence." Ibid., p. 73. True religion, therefore, is concerned with that "side of the universe which we can care for. It...provides a meaning, in terms of value, for our existence, a meaning which flows from the nature of things." Ibid., p. 110.

process on its various levels - is all about. The clarity, consistency and comprehensiveness of his thought on the question of the meaning of life qualifies it as a highly satisfying attempt at a constructive answer.

And yet, there is something lacking. For, while Wieman is willing to acknowledge the numinous in life (as that experienced depth of reality which remains yet unknown), he is unwilling to permit theology to take the numinous into account, relegating mystery to the "non-cognitive" symbols of practical use for worship, and for religious living. He does not thereby mean to suggest that the non-cognitive symbols are unimportant. Indeed, he is convinced that the first hand religious experience for which non-cognitive symbols may function is of first priority, since he considers it categorical that experience of God is the need of our time.[1] But, according to Wieman, the task of theology is to give insofar as it is possible a rational account of these experiences, and in order to do this theology must use cognitive symbols, and thus limit itself to

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1 It needs to be asked, however, if "non-cognitive" symbols which are not believed to be in some sense true are not destined to lose their power of helping man function in relation to God.

that which can be empirically described, even though this presents but a fragmentary sketch from the surface of a reality which in its depth fades into mystery.

Wieman's sharp distinction between cognitive and non-cognitive symbols thus calls forth the important question: is a theology which acknowledges the numinous, but is unwilling to represent the numinous as numinous in its constructive analysis, not likely to end up with a shallow distortion of the truth rather than merely a factual account of what can be known? Is it not being inconsistent with and therefore untrue to its own best presuppositions about the richness of the experiences which compose human life by refusing some sort of systematic representation of the non-cognitive? Daniel Day Williams surely speaks to the point when he wonders if "the actual grasp of truth" is not "thinned out"[1] by Wieman's somewhat unrealistically sharp distinction between cognitive and non-cognitive symbols, with the result that "something flat and, in the end, superficial"[2] appears when the use of non-cognitive

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1 Williams, "Wieman as a Christian Theologian," in The Empirical Theology of Henry Nelson Wieman, Bretall, p. 94.

2 Ibid., p. 93.

symbols is denied to theology. Similarly, Reinhold Niebuhr observes that "the irrationality of this [Wieman's] cult of reason is that it merely denies the reality of any fact which does not fit into its conception of rational coherence."[1]

Wieman actually agrees that his theology is not itself an expression of the fullness of the human experience of the divine, and therefore, taken by itself it is inadequate. His point on the matter is that while the theologian, as a religious man, must use non-cognitive symbols through which he operates in relation to the numinous, the specific task and obligation of theology is to empirically determine "the distinguishing structure of what actually does operate" redemptively in human life, as over against the destructive forces. Wieman does not see the task of theology, or at least does not see his own task, as involving a comprehensive and structured analysis of the full depths of religious experience. He is more concerned that theology should point to the actual source and means of redemption than that it should deal at

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1 Niebuhr, "Reply to Interpretation and Criticism," in Reinhold Niebuhr: His Religious, Social, and Political Thought, Kegley and Bretall, p. 449.

length and in depth with a reflection upon that which still remains unknown. To this extent, he is more an evangelist than a theologian in the classical sense, and his work leaves still undetermined how the non-cognitive symbols, admittedly necessary for the functioning of the religious life, are to be developed.

For Wieman, cognitive language is only a description of the empirically verifiable, it is not a symbolic clue to the still unknown. Actually, however, and although he may not formally intend it to be so, his empirical answers are not simply empirical, and they do also in some sense function as non-cognitive and symbolic representations of the numinous. They serve as "tentative formulations of the ultimate generalities."[1] To the (indeterminable) extent to which Wieman's general propositions do serve as symbolic representations and explanations of the mysteries of life, the question

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1 "Metaphysical categories are not dogmatic statements of the obvious; they are tentative formulations of the ultimate generalities." Alfred North Whitehead, Process and Reality, p. 11. Wieman indicates his continued agreement with Whitehead on this matter in The Empirical Theology of Henry Nelson Wieman, p. 97. See also Whitehead, Religion in the Making, p. 32, "Generality is the salt of Religion."

arises: how satisfactorily do they represent the numinous? This is a question which can not be empirically decided. But, it is a question which must be dealt with in some way. If consciously used cognitive language is only to represent the empirically verifiable, then some semi-cognitive language should be designated to represent the numinous. For, without this semi-cognitive language, the numinous is either left to be represented by the purely cognitive language (a distortion), or it is not represented at all (a denial). Therefore, if the depth of reality which can not (yet) be explained in cognitive language is not <u>represented</u> by semi-cognitive language along with the purely cognitive, any answer to the question of the meaning of life is destined to be of highly restricted help because it is a guide not to the meaning of life in its fullness, but only of life on the fragmentary, cognitive, and therefore obvious level.[1]

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1 "There is a quality of life which lies always beyond the mere fact of life; and when we include the quality in the fact, there is still omitted the quality of the quality." Alfred North Whitehead, <u>Religion in the Making</u>, p. 68.

Wieman's answer to the question of the meaning of life is characterized by the fact that it is at once acutely accurate and unsatisfactory. It is accurate in that it states with a high degree of precision and lucidity what is involved in the quest for meaning, and how an answer is to be found. It is unsatisfactory in that it fails to develop through living (if partially non-cognitive) symbols what many (and perhaps also Wieman) would describe as "real" experiences which nevertheless can not be caught within the grasp of purely cognitive language. The meaning of life, which fades into mystery, can not be satisfactorily described apart from some symbolic representation of that mystery. Wieman's answer to the question of the meaning of life, precisely because (as Wieman recognizes) life includes the numinous, does not do justice to the full breadth and depth of life. For, if the numinous is a valid part of the experiences of life, then it deserves and demands some representation by theology in its systematic analysis and construction. If, however, Wieman overstates the case for grounding theology in the empirical and observable facts of reality, he certainly points to a

need which should not be ignored. Some kind of a balance - not between fact and fancy, but between empirical fact and non-empirical fact nevertheless represented - is to be sought.

CHAPTER VII

The Meaning of Life

in the

Theology of Paul Tillich

I

The question of the meaning of life is both highly compatible with and an intimate concern of the theology of Paul Tillich, and it is both of these for two reasons. First, Tillich tends to think and organize his thought in terms of questions and answers. Such a procedure composes the foundation of his theological method. He is open to and, indeed, welcomes questions. The preface to his Systematic Theology concludes with these words: "A help in answering questions: this is exactly the purpose of this theological system."[1] Secondly, the question of meaning is recognized by Tillich as the question of our time. He declares unequivocally that "the anxiety which determines our period is the anxiety of doubt and meaninglessness."[2] For the twentieth century, other questions "are implied but they are not decisive."[3]

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1 Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, 3 vols. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951, 1957, 1963), I, viii.

2 Paul Tillich, The Courage to Be (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), p. 173.

3 Ibid., p. 142.

Before entering into a detailed study of the answers which Tillich suggests, it is necessary to examine something of the theological structure of Tillich's thought in order to understand the vocabulary, presuppositions and philosophical background in which the answers are contained.

Tillich's Systematic Theology is organized so as to answer questions. Such organisation is, for Tillich, an aspect of theology itself and not just an optional arrangement of it. For "systematic theology proceeds in the following way: it makes an analysis of the human situation out of which the existential questions arise, and it demonstrates that the symbols used in the Christian message are the answers to these questions."[1] Tillich calls such a procedure the "method of correlation"[2] and describes

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1 Tillich, Systematic Theology, I, 62. A good summary of Tillich's understanding of religious symbols can be found in Ibid., II, 9. A "symbol" is to be distinguished from a "sign," which simply points to, designates or defines something which has no inner relation to it. A symbol "negates itself in its literal meaning, but affirms itself in its self-transcending meaning....It represents the power and meaning of what it symbolizes through participation. The symbol participates in the reality which is symbolized."

2 Ibid., pp. 59 f.

it as "the backbone of the structure of the present system."[1] Theology begins by looking at and participating in man's predicament. On the basis of its analysis and experience, it "formulates the questions implied in human existence."[2] Such an analysis does not produce an answer - only a question. "One cannot derive the divine self-manifestation from an analysis of the human predicament....Man is the question, not the answer."[3] Such existential questions are always independent of the theological answers in that the former do not produce the latter - there is no "natural theology" in the Thomistic sense.[4] Similarly, it is wrong to attempt to derive the question implied in human existence from previously given, supposedly revelatory, answers. "This is impossible because the revelatory answer is meaningless if there is no question to which it is the answer. Man cannot receive an answer to a question he has not asked....Any such answer would be foolishness for him, an understandable combination of words...but not a revelatory experience."[5]

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1 Ibid., p. 66.
2 Ibid., p. 61.
3 Ibid., II, 13.
4 Ibid., I, 204-206; II, 14.
5 Ibid., II, 13.

Thus, while the existential question and the theological answer remain independent of one another (in the sense that neither arises or is derived from the other), Tillich is able to speak of the "'interdependence of two independent factors.'"[1]

Tillich's "method of correlation," however, describes only one aspect of his methodology. A second (and at least equally important) aspect is his use of the "phenomenological approach" made popular by Edmund Husserl.[2]

> The test of a phenomenological description is that the picture given by it is convincing, that it can be seen by anyone who is willing to look in the same direction, that the description illuminates other related ideas, and that it makes the reality which these ideas are supposed to reflect understandable.[3]

This important definition describes Tillich's conscious methodological procedure in <u>formulating</u> existential questions and in <u>describing</u> revelatory answers.

The proper subject matter of theology, whether

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1 <u>Ibid.</u> See also I, 61 where Tillich describes the correlation as in fact having a circular character in which "questions and answers are not separated."

2 Edmund Husserl, <u>Ideas</u>, trans. by Boyce Gibson (New York: Macmillan Company, 1931). See also Husserl's article "Phenomenology," in the <u>Encyclopedia Britannica</u>.

3 Tillich, <u>Systematic Theology</u>, I, 106.

formulating existential questions or theological answers, is defined as "what concerns us ultimately. Only those propositions are theological which deal with their object in so far as it can become a matter of ultimate concern for us."[1] Our "ultimate concern" is defined as "that which determines our being or not-being."[2] But by "being" Tillich does not merely refer to the power of "existence in time and space," but also to "the structure, the meaning, and the aim of existence."[3] Only that is a matter of ultimate concern, and therefore an object of theology, which has "the power of threatening and saving our being" in this meaningful sense.[4] Thus, speculative type questions which do not have the power to determine our being or not-being and are therefore not a matter of ultimate concern for us, must be excluded as irrelevant.[5] Theology concerns itself with man's faith, "the dynamics of man's ultimate concern."[6]

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1 Ibid., p. 12. See also, Matthew Arnold, Literature & Dogma (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1873), p. 38. "The monotheistic idea of Israel is simply seriousness."

2 Ibid., p. 14.

3 Ibid. Thus, Tillich speaks of "the experienced ultimacy of being and meaning. It is the realm of ultimate concern." (Ibid., p. 212.)

4 Ibid., p. 14.

5 Ibid.

6 Paul Tillich, Dynamics of Faith (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), p. 1.

Finally, theology is necessarily ambiguous in character. It "is subject to the contradictions of man's existential situation."[1] The theological answer in the ultimate sense "is beyond our grasp and never at our disposal (though it might grasp us and dispose of us)."[2] No "religious arrogance" should deny its "being historically conditioned" or its obvious "mark of finitude." "The correct and indispensable first principle," the Protestant principle, is that "'God is in heaven and man is on earth,'" and this is true "even if man is a systematic theologian."[3]

Any consideration of Tillich's theology must, very early, come to grips with his ontology, for this constitutes the conceptual foundation underlying his entire systematic structure, and the appearance of any particular doctrine or thought can only be properly interpreted and understood in reference to it. This is true because Tillich understands the question of ontology as the

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1 Tillich, Systematic Theology, I, 54.
2 Ibid., p. 52.
3 Ibid. See also Paul Tillich, The Protestant Era, trans. by James L. Adams (London: Nisbet & Co., Ltd., 1951), chapter 14.

philosophical question, basic to all others,[1] and builds consciously on this presupposition. "Thought must start with being; it cannot go behind it."[2] Being simply "precedes" all else in "logical dignity."[3] As such it "cannot be defined. For in every definition being is presupposed."[4] Neither the philosopher nor the theologian can avoid the ontological question since it "is always thought implicitly, and sometimes explicitly if something is said to be."[5] All attempts to avoid the ontological question are destined to failure, since ontology is implied in the very act of thought.[6] "Reason has being, participates in being, and is logically subordinate to being....Thought is based on being, and it cannot leave this basis."[7]

God as the Ground of Being: Tillich describes God, who is "the foundation and the center of every

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1 Ibid., p. 19.
2 Ibid., p. 163.
3 Paul Tillich, "Reply to Interpretation and Criticism," The Theology of Paul Tillich, ed. by Charles W. Kegley & Robert W. Bretall (The Macmillan Company: New York, 1959), p. 339.
4 Paul Tillich, Love, Power and Justice (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 35.
5 Tillich, Systematic Theology, I, 163. See also I, 19; II, 5-12; and Paul Tillich, Biblical Religion and the Search for Ultimate Reality (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1955).
6 Ibid., I, 19; II, 5-12.
7 Ibid., I, 163.

theological thought,"[1] in just these ontological terms. "God is the answer to the question implied in being."[2] By this he means "that the concept of being as being, or being-itself, points to the power inherent in everything" that is.[3] This "power of being," or "power to conquer non-being," as the source and foundation of everything which has being, is also described as the "ground of being."[4] Such an abstraction is important for Tillich since he very much wants to avoid thinking of God as a being alongside or above others. "If God is not being-itself, he is subordinate to it....The structure of being-itself is his fate."[5] But such an ultimate generality is not an irrelevant or unmeaningful one, even though "it demands the ability of radical abstraction." It is, rather, an "expression of the experience of being over against non-being....The same word, the emptiest of all concepts when taken as an abstraction, becomes the most meaningful of all concepts when it is understood as the power of being in everything that has

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1 Ibid., II, 5.
2 Ibid., I, 163.
3 Ibid., p. 236.
4 Ibid., p. 235.
5 Ibid., p. 236.

being."[1] Only such a God can properly be embraced as man's "ultimate concern."[2] Tillich describes "the statement that God is being-itself" as a "non-symbolic statement" because "it does not point beyond itself. It means what it says directly and properly....However, after this has been said, nothing else can be said about God which is not symbolic."[3]

God as the Ground of Meaning:[4] In a discussion of the traditional "proofs" or "arguments" for the existence of God, Tillich concludes that "there can be little doubt that the arguments are a failure."[5] Actually, he had already reached this conclusion in developing his "method of correlation." The theological answer remains independent of the existential question - one cannot lead to the other. Nevertheless, Tillich finds certain of these "arguments" valuable as "expressions of the question of God

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1 Ibid., II, 11.
2 Ibid., I, 14, 15, 273; II, 125.
3 Ibid., I, 238, 239.
4 The term "ground of meaning" is not a regular part of Tillich's vocabulary, although it is implied at several points (I, 212, 250) and actually appears on page 210. It is justified as a heading here in order to limit and relate the discussion of Tillich's doctrine of God to the question of the meaning of life.
5 Tillich, Systematic Theology, I, 204.

which is implied in human finitude. This question is their truth; every answer they give is untrue."[1] The cosmological argument moves from the fact of finite being to the question of infinite being. It therefore must receive priority since it asks the ontological question.[2] But Tillich also wishes to recognize the teleological argument which moves from the experience of finite meaning to the question of infinite meaning. At this point he raises "the question of the ground of meaning."[3]

The ground of being is also the ground of meaning. This is true because "being and the logos of being cannot be separated."[4] Tillich develops this thought most constructively in his consideration of the "trinitarian principles."[5] He distinguishes between the depth of the divine abyss (the element of power) and the divine logos (the element of meaning). In itself "the first principle would be chaos, burning fire,...absolute seclusion."[6] It is because of the second principle that "the divine life

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1 Ibid., p. 205.
2 Ibid., p. 210.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., p. 251.
5 Ibid., pp. 249-252.
6 Ibid., p. 251.

[although] infinite mystery,...is not infinite emptiness."[1] For the logos is "the mirror of the divine depth, the principle of God's self-objectification."[2] As such it is the meaning as well as the structure of creation.[3] The third principle (Spirit) unites and actualizes power (the abyss) and meaning (the logos), and so is "in a way the whole (God is Spirit)."[4] But it is the second trinitarian principle, the logos, which permits us to speak of God as the "ground of meaning." This God is "the experienced ultimacy of being and meaning," and so, "is the realm of ultimate concern."[5]

It is basic in approaching Tillich's theology to understand the distinction he draws between "being," "non-being" and "existence." He wishes to reserve the word "being" to describe "being-itself" or the "ground of being" i.e. God.[6] Over against this basic ontological (and theological) concept, Tillich places "non-being." It is

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1 Ibid.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid. See also pp. 157-159.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid., p. 212.
6 Of course Tillich is aware of the possibility of speaking of man as a being. (Ibid., p. 168.) His distinction is for the purpose of theological and philosophical clarification and not an attempt to reform common English usage. (Ibid., pp. 235, 236.)

important to understand that Tillich does not wish to suggest or imply a latent dualism. "Non-being" is not a me-ontic something opposed to "being-itself." Rather it "is ouk on, the undialectical negation of being."[1] It can only be described as "not-being" in that it is simply not there.[2] It is "indicated in...the tohu-va-bohu,...the emptiness, which precedes creation."[3] And as such it "is literally nothing except in relation to being..., as the word 'non-being' itself indicates."[4]

Between God (the ground of being) and non-being (the absolute nothingness) lies existence or the realm of creation. The Christian doctrine of creation ex nihilo "says something fundamentally important about the creature, namely, that it must take over what might be called 'the heritage of non-being.'"[5] However, the fact that the creature is indicates that it also has being as its heritage.[6] It is grounded in being, "otherwise it would not have the power of being."[7] And this is precisely

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1 Tillich, Systematic Theology, I, 188.
2 Ibid., p. 185.
3 Ibid., p. 179.
4 Ibid., p. 189.
5 Ibid., p. 253.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid., p. 237.

the phenomenon of existence. Creation exists by participating both in being and in non-being.[1] Man can only be understood as a mixture of them both.[2]

Everything that exists participates in and is dependent upon being-itself.[3] However, there is no gradual blending of being-itself into existence. Rather, there is an "infinite jump" between them.[4] Therefore, God must not be said to "exist."[5] Only creation "exists." Just this two-fold fact must be noted: all existence is grounded in being, and the ground of being infinitely transcends all of existence. Similarly, all existence is grounded in the divine logos, but the ground of meaning infinitely transcends all of existence.

Man's uniqueness within the structure of

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1 Ibid., p. 137.
2 Ibid., p. 189. For a visual analogy (which can be dangerous as well as helpful) it is possible to think of existence as the grey between white or being and black or non-being, participating in them both. Or it is possible to think of existence as the atmosphere between the earth, being, and space, non-being. The main problem is, of course, that, unlike black and space, non-being is not there, and, in terms of time-space, pure being isn't there either.
3 Ibid., p. 237.
4 Ibid., p. 237. Here is another danger and weakness in the white, grey, black analogy.
5 Ibid., pp. 205, 237.

existence consists in the fact that "man alone is immediately aware of this structure."[1] This awareness arises from the fact that, while remaining a part of the world, he also stands as a reality over against it. To be a "self," in fact, "means being separated in some way from everything else, having everything else opposite one's self, being able to look at it and to act upon it. At the same time, however, this self is aware that it belongs to that at which it looks."[2] Man separates himself, and thereby ceases to be merely a part of his world; he also exists in polar unity over against it. Thus Tillich speaks of a "self-world polarity."[3] The thought is important and will occur again.

Underlying this "self-world polarity," in which man "separates" himself from his world while remaining a part of it, is the historic doctrine of the "fall," and the very important place within Tillich's thought for what he describes as "the

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1 Ibid., p. 168.
2 Ibid., p. 170.
3 Ibid., p. 171. Tillich's use of the term "polarity" is quite different from its use by Heim (p. 164 this paper). Something of Tillich's relationship to Roman Catholic theology can be seen in P. Erich Przywara's book Polarity: A German Catholic's Interpretation of Religion, trans. by A.C. Bourquet, (London: Oxford University Press, 1935).

transition from essence to existence."[1]

"Theology must clearly and unambiguously represent 'the Fall' as a symbol for the human situation universally."[2] In undertaking this task, Tillich speaks of "the transition from essence to existence" as a "half-way demythologization."[3] It is necessary to have an "image" of essential man. But that image should not be permitted to take on the character of "once upon a time."[4] "It has no time....It has no place." But it is "present in all stages of [man's] development, although in existential distortion."[5] "Essential Man" must not be understood as "perfect," for he is merely "uncontested and undecided."[6] He cannot be discovered because in himself he is nothing other than "dreaming innocence" which remains "hidden in the ground of the divine life."[7] His primary importance consists in the fact that he is "non-actualized potentiality."[8]

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1 Ibid., II, 29. Tillich writes that "a complete discussion of the relation of essence to existence is identical with the entire theological system." Ibid., I, 204.
2 Ibid., II, 29.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid., p. 33.
6 Ibid., p. 34.
7 Ibid., I, 260.
8 Ibid., II, 33.

But as "non-actualized potentiality" essential man is confronted with a "double threat."[1] For him to remain more potentiality would be to lose what he potentially is. For him to actualize himself, he must risk losing his essence. He stands between these two possibilities, and "decides for self-actualization."[2] The result is "not a break, but an imperfect fulfilment."[3] In so far as essence is that which makes a man a man, his essence still supports him. In so far as his existence is an ambiguous distortion of his essence, his essence stands over and against him, judging and commanding him.[4] Man "is given the possibility and necessity of actualizing himself." In this possibility consists his right to be called the image of God.[5] But "his greatness and his weakness are identical." "Fully developed creatureliness is fallen creatureliness," and there never was a time when it was otherwise. Indeed, "creation and Fall coincide."[6]

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1 Ibid., p. 35.
2 Ibid., p. 36. The acorn is potentially (and essentially) an oak tree. But it must take root and grow in order to actualize its essence in existence. This, however, subjects it to the risk of distorted growth and even destruction.
3 Ibid., p. 30.
4 Ibid., I, 203.
5 Ibid., p. 259.
6 Ibid., II, 33.

How is this transition from essence to existence possible? Tillich answers that it is made possible through what he calls "finite freedom."[1] Man is free. He transcends "the chain of stimulus and response by deliberation and decision."[2] But, his freedom is not unconditional. Like the rest of his existence, it is limited by non-being; it is finite. What is more, it exists in "polarity" with man's destiny. Now "destiny" in Tillich's thought is not to be understood as fate, it "is not a strange power which determines what shall happen to me."[3] Rather, and instead, "it is myself as given, formed by nature, history, and myself."[4] "Destiny is that out of which our decisions arise,"[5] in that it presents the opportunities through which freedom actualizes itself. Therefore, destiny is "united with meaning" because it supplies the possibilities which can make a life meaningful.[6]

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1 Ibid., I, 255; II, 31. Here another analogy is possible: a flame shooting out from the sun has had to leave the ground of its being in order to actualize its own existence. It is still grounded in the sun, but now it is also surrounded by space which limits it. It exists, it is free, but under the limiting conditions of finitude.

2 Ibid., I, 258.

3 Ibid., p. 185.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid., p. 184.

6 Ibid., p. 201.

Freedom and destiny together imply "responsibility,"[1] the responsibility to actualize freedom in a meaningful decision.

This concept of "finite Freedom" and the "polarity of freedom and destiny" point "not to the opposite of freedom but rather to its conditions and limits."[2] "Freedom and destiny are correlates."[3] But the tragic significance of finite freedom consists in its providing "the point at which creation and fall coincide."[4]

Finite freedom is freedom for man within the "structures of finitude."[5] These "structures" (which Tillich, using the Kantian term, also calls "categories") are time, space, causality and substance.[6] In themselves they are simply "forms" which are "present in everything."[7] But under the conditions of existence they may become "structures of destruction."[8] Time may only tell man of his transitoriness. Space may only confront him with his loneliness. Causality may only speak to him of fate and

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1 Ibid., II, 57.
2 Ibid., I, 201.
3 Ibid., p. 255.
4 Ibid., pp. 255 f.
5 Ibid., p. 190.
6 Ibid., p. 193.
7 Ibid., p. 192.
8 Ibid., II, 60-75.

contingency. Substance may only remind him of his own heritage in non-being.[1] Man within the structures of finitude is threatened by them. Failing to be genuinely responsible, he may "use his freedom to waste his freedom," and the destructive consequences are that "it is his destiny to lose his destiny."[2] This is the tragic character of existence - the very real possibility of the loss of self (which, because of the self-world polarity, necessarily includes the loss of his world).[3] Indeed, the self as itself, as pure subjectivity, does not even exist. "It is actual only in unity with" that which threatens it.[4] In the absence of that unity, disintegration, the terrible experience of "falling to pieces" is the alternative.[5] Absolute doubt - about himself and about his world - takes hold of man. "He is thrown into restlessness, emptiness, cynicism and the experience of meaninglessness."[6] And finally, "not even the meaningfulness of a serious question of meaning is left for him."[7] Estrangement becomes the basic reality

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1 Ibid., I, 193-198; II, 68-70.
2 Ibid., II, 63.
3 Ibid., p. 61.
4 Ibid., p. 62.
5 Ibid., p. 61.
6 Ibid., p. 73.
7 Ibid., p. 74.

("Man is estranged from the ground of his being, from other beings, and from himself."[1], and *despair* the basic mood ("The pain of despair is the agony of being responsible for the loss of the meaning of one's existence and of being unable to recover it."[2]). Man has lost both himself and his world, "he has only his environment."[3]

In such a state of existential estrangement and despair the question of the meaning of life takes on truly deep and real significance. But the possibility of self-loss remains "a possibility, not a necessity."[4] "The structures of destruction are not the only mark of existence. They are counterbalanced by structures of healing and re-union."[5] Therefore, there is cause to hope for an answer.

II

In approaching the *teleological* dimension of the question of the meaning of life, and the answer contained within the structure of Tillich's thought,

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1 *Ibid.*, p. 44.
2 *Ibid.*, p. 75.
3 *Ibid.*, p. 62.
4 *Ibid.*, I, 201.
5 *Ibid.*, II, 75.

it is helpful to begin by noting his understanding of creation. Tillich does not think of creation as an event which began "once upon a time." Instead, he conceives of creation as an ever present "correlate" to the divine life.[1] Indeed, "the divine life and the divine creativity are not different." We may, in fact, say that creativity "is identical with his life."[2] Similarly, the idea of preservation is, in fact, identical with "continuous creativity."[3] The real importance, therefore, of the doctrine of creation is that it points to and describes the basic relationship between "the situation of creaturelines and its correlate, the divine creativity."[4] The realm of creation stands in eternally dependent polarity with the life of the Eternal God.

In the light of this understanding, Tillich finds the question of the purpose of creation to be "an ambiguous concept."[5] He questions the

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1 Ibid., I, 252, 253.
2 Ibid., p. 252.
3 Ibid., p. 262.
4 Ibid., pp. 252 f. Karl Heim believes that in the light of present day science, this "bold dream of the philosophers that the world is eternal seems to have become improbable." The World: Its Creation and Consummation, trans. by Robert Smith (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), p. 24. But, see Fred Hoyle, The Nature of the Universe (Oxford: Bazil Blackwell & Mott Ltd., 1952).
5 Ibid., p. 263.

wisdom of maintaining the "highly symbolic" suggestions of Calvin, that God created the world to be the theater of his glory, and of Luther, that he created the world to be an object of his love, since in both of these answers "the implication is that God needs something" outside himself - though both Calvin and Luther would wish to deny it.[1] Similarly, Tillich rejects the possibility that creation is a "necessary" or "contingent" act of God in the sense of depending upon circumstances or motivations "outside" him. God has no fate.

Furthermore, the question of the "purpose of God" is made complex by the implication contained within it, that God is a person. Tillich finds the idea of a personal God to be a "confusing symbol" (but not, therefore, invalid).[2] It is not correct to think of God as a person. He "is the ground of everything personal..., he is not less than personal."[3] But it is necessary to recognise that the thought of God as a person with a purpose is necessarily a symbolic way of thinking. Tillich prefers, therefore, to answer the question

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1 Ibid., p. 264.
2 Ibid., p. 245.
3 Ibid.

only after a delicate shift in emphasis. He would replace the concept "purpose of creation" with "telos of creativity," since he feels that this latter term points more concretely to the form in which the question can be answered.[1] Telos suggests to Tillich the inner aim of fulfilment toward which creation is being directed. Thus, we must not attempt to go behind creation and ask: What is the purpose which motivates God to create? (since creation is a correlate to the divine life, nothing "motivates" God). But, given the fact of God's creativity, we may and should ask: What is God's aim (telos) for it?

The substance of Tillich's answer to the question is tentatively contained in the statement: "We affirm...that man is the telos of creation."[2] He is such because in the actualization of his finite freedom "man...is completely individualized."[3] Indeed, the telos of God's creativity for mankind is the creation of men i.e. individuals. Tillich indicates his agreement with Aristotle that it is "individual beings" which are "the telos, the

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1 Ibid., p. 264.
2 Ibid., p. 259.
3 Ibid., p. 175.

inner aim, of the process of actualization."[1] Thus he speaks of "the unconditional demand addressing itself to every potential personality to become an actual personality....This unconditional demand... does not come from outside man, it is not a strange law to which he is subjected by a tyrannical god or a despotic society or a psychological mechanism; it is the expression of his own being, of the ground and aim of his existence."[2] Man is not, therefore, to be understood as "an exemplar, representing in an individual way the universal characteristics of the species."[3] Such an interpretation may be correct for all non-human beings, such as animals. But "man is different," as is indicated in the very use of the word "person," the original meaning of which "points to the actor's mask which makes him a definite character."[4] The significance of the individual as an individual is implied in the very use of the word "exist," the root meaning of which is "outstanding," and which suggests among other things "standing out of the average level of

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1 Ibid., p. 174.
2 Tillich, The Protestant Era, p. 132.
3 Tillich, Systematic Theology, I, 175.
4 Ibid.

things or men,"[1] the actualization of his own individual potentialities.[2] Indeed, it is his "structural centeredness," his individuality which "gives man his greatness, dignity, and being," and allows him to be called the "image of God."[3] Thus, when Tillich thinks of the telos of God's creativity he has in mind the individual human person. God wants mankind to be composed of men. His purpose for each particular man is that he be an individual man.

This description of Tillich's answer to the teleological dimension of the question is, so far, incomplete. Indeed, taken alone, it is wrong. But it is the correct and necessary first step toward understanding a complex and profound answer.

The incompleteness of the answer as just given consists in the fact that it represents but one side of a reality the very nature of which is polar. Thus, Tillich speaks of "the polarity of individualization and participation."[4] Just as man the self exists only in polarity with his world,[5] so man the

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1 Ibid., II, 20.
2 Ibid., I, 283.
3 Ibid., II, 49.
4 Ibid., I, 177.
5 See p. 379 this paper. Also Ibid., I, 168-171.

individual exists only in participation with other individuals. The individual self, alone, is an "empty shell."[1] A man only "discovers himself through" the encounter with other individuals.[2] Even the hostility and resistance of others is a kind of participation with them, and it is only in this resistance-participation context that "the person is born."[3] Participation, then, is not an "accidental" option for the individual; it is "essential." He is "impossible" without it.[4]

Under the conditions of existential estrangement, the individual-participation polarity may become a polarity between loneliness and collectivity.[5] Man is threatened by the possibility of being alone and thereby losing his world and communion with others. On the other hand he is threatened by the possible loss of himself, his individuality and subjectivity, by submergence in complete collectivization. In truth "the loss of either pole means the loss of both."[6] This threat,

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1 Tillich, Systematic Theology, II, 65.
2 Ibid., I, 177. See also Tillich, Love, Power and Justice, p. 78.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., p. 176.
5 Ibid., p. 199. See also Tillich's sermon on "Loneliness and Solitude" in The Eternal Now (London: SCM Press, 1963), pp. 9-17.
6 Ibid.

however, remains "a possibility, not a necessity."[1] It exists only as that which is not the "telos of creativity." There is another direction in which a man's life may move, another possibility.

This alternative, this possibility which is the telos of creativity, also exists as a variation of the individual-participation polarity. It can best be described as a polarity between "the person" and "communion." "When individualization reaches the perfect form which we call a 'person,' participation reaches the perfect form which we call 'communion.'" Tillich defines "communion" as "participation in another completely centered and completely individual self." The person does not exist without communion with other persons,[2] and the more truly individualized a person is, the more he is able to participate in communion with others.[3] "There is no depth of life without the depth of the common life."[4] "The two poles are interdependent."[5] Man is meant by God to be an individual - a person.

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1 Ibid., p. 201.
2 Ibid., p. 176.
3 Ibid., II, 65.
4 Paul Tillich, The Shaking of the Foundations (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), p. 57.
5 Tillich, Systematic Theology, II, 65.

But not an individual alone (for then, indeed, he would not be a person). The telos of God's creativity would have man be an individual person in active participation or communion with his fellow individual persons. The qualitative difference, in Tillich's thought, between "collectivization" and "communion" could hardly be greater. Of course, under the conditions of existence all differences in life are partial and ambiguous - but the difference remains.

At this point, however, the answer to the teleological dimension of the question is still incomplete. It is merely formal, and without material content or the power to become actual. Therefore, it is necessary for theology to proceed with the affirmation that the qualitative and material aim of God's directing creativity, the final telos for human life, is the New Being which first appeared in Jesus. "In him has appeared what fulfillment qualitatively means."[1] This New Being is the "ultimately new towards which history moves."[2]

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1 Ibid., p. 119.
2 Ibid., p. 162.

When Tillich speaks of the New Being he means more (though certainly never less) than the individual person living in communion with other persons. The term New Being points to the new qualitative possibility for man. That possibility is "essential being under the conditions of existence, conquering the gap between essence and existence."[1] It can, therefore, be said to be "new in two respects: it is new in contrast to the merely potential character of essential being; and it is new over against the estranged character of existential being."[2] As there is an "infinite jump"[3] between existence and the ground of being, so there is an infinite jump between existential meaning and the ground of meaning. But, the New Being is the power which bridges this gap, bringing salvation (healing) and atonement (at-one-ment).[4] "There is a power from beyond existence which for us is verifiable by participation."[5] This New Being has nothing to do with our obedience to a new law (which would only be old

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1 Ibid., p. 119.
2 Ibid.
3 page 378 this paper.
4 Tillich, Systematic Theology, II, 170-176.
5 Paul Tillich, Theology of Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 212.

being) or a sacrifice of the intellect (also old being). It is not concerned with "divine-human-nature chemistry."[1] Rather, it is concerned with "healing power overcoming estrangement."[2] This New Reality which was operative in Jesus is "the power of being conquering non-being. It is eternity conquering temporality. It is grace conquering sin. It is ultimate reality conquering doubt."[3] The New Being is the power and quality of being, the new state of being, which became unambiguously manifest in Jesus (who is, therefore, called the Christ),[4] but in which every human being may participate.[5]

To discuss the New Being in Tillich's theology is to consider the pinnacle toward which all of the lines of his thought point, and in which all of them meet. The New Being is the "restorative principle of the whole...theological system."[6] Consequently, there is no aspect of his theology which can not properly be discussed as a matter of secondary consideration under this heading. But, since, for Tillich, the answer to the teleological dimension

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1 Ibid., p. 211.
2 Ibid., p. 212.
3 Ibid., p. 213.
4 Tillich, Systematic Theology, II, 97, 98.
5 Ibid., p. 119.
6 Ibid.

of the question of the meaning of life is largely identical with the concept of the New Being, it is necessary to impose arbitrary limits to the discussion, lest the entire theological system simply be repeated. This can be most helpfully accomplished by, for the most part, limiting description to the section of Systematic Theology entitled "Life and the Spirit."[1]

An important concept for approaching an understanding of the New Being is what Tillich calls the "multidimensional unity of life."[2] By "dimensions" he has reference to the inorganic realm, the organic realm, the realm in which inner awareness or self-awareness appears, and the realm of spirit. Tillich's point is that all of these realms or dimensions are potentially real in the inorganic, which therefore has a "preferred position...in so far as it is the first condition for the actualization of every dimension,"[3] but that the realm of the spirit is of greatest value among the dimensions because "that

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1 Part IV of the system, appearing in Systematic Theology, III, 11-294.

2 Tillich, Systematic Theology, III, 13 passim.

3 Ibid., p. 19. Commenting on an earlier development of this idea, A. Seth Pringle-Pattison observed that "potentiality" is "perhaps the most slippery term in the whole vocabulary of philosophy." The Idea of God in the Light of Recent Philosophy (Aberdeen: The University Press, 1917), p. 106.

which presupposes something else and adds to it is by so much the richer."[1] The life of man actualises all of the dimensions of this multidimensional unity, potentially present in the whole of creation. This thought is important, and is to be presupposed throughout the entire discussion.

When Tillich uses the term "spirit" (with a small "s") he is thinking of the characteristically human capacity of the centered self to transcend its own psychological material, and, by deliberation and decision, to unite "the power of being with the meaning of being," to act with purpose.[2] This corresponds to Tillich's use of the term Spirit (with a capital "S") as the third trinitarian principle, which unites in God the power of being itself with the divine logos.[3] The multidimensional unity of life means that human spirit is to be understood neither in terms of a body-spirit dualism, nor as a mere factor to be dissolved into the psychological material upon which it is dependent and from which it arises.[4] Human spirit integrates all of the

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1 Ibid., p. 17.
2 Ibid., pp. 27, 111.
3 It is Tillich's practice to capitalise God, Spirit, New Being, and (usually) Divine - but not being-itself, ground of being, or logos.
4 Tillich, Systematic Theology, III, 28.

dimensions of life (as it is dependent upon them all) in the unity of the whole man.

The importance of the Divine Spirit for the human spirit (and the question of the meaning of life) appears in this relationship: Just as God, as being-itself, is the power of being in everything that has being, so "the Spirit of God is the presence of the Divine Life within creaturely life," and particularly within the human spirit, beyond the subject-object structure.[1] "The Spirit of God is not a separated being," but is to be understood as "God present,"[2] and present as a "meaning-bearing power which grasps the human spirit in an ecstatic experience."[3] By "ecstasy" Tillich does not mean to imply anything bizarre. "Ecstasy does not negate," but rather fulfills "the structure of the centered self which bears the dimension of spirit."[4] The Spiritual Presence drives the human spirit into a "successful self-transcendence," and under the impact of the meaning-bearing power the human spirit asks the question of ultimate meaning, of unambiguous life, of

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1 Ibid., p. 107.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., p. 115.
4 Ibid., p. 114.

ultimate concern.[1] This points to what is meant by the Pauline phrase describing a man's being "in Christ." There is neither a violation of man's essential structure nor a dualistic confrontation with a supranaturalistic power strange to man's nature. There is no "correlation" between man's natural spirit and the Divine Spirit, but rather a "mutual immanence"[2] involving "participation in the Christ who 'is the Spirit.'"[3] "A union of subject and object has taken place in which the independent existence of each is overcome; new unity is created."[4] Indeed, a new situation is created for the whole of a man's existence. For, according to the multidimensional unity of life, the impact of the Divine Spirit upon the human spirit has implications for all of the dimensions of creation.[5] This "new situation" is important - it is New Being.

For the human spirit, the experience of "being grasped" by the Divine Spirit is known as faith.[6] Tillich notes that "nothing is more undignified

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1 Ibid., p. 112.
2 Ibid., p. 114.
3 Ibid., p. 117.
4 Ibid., p. 119.
5 Ibid., pp. 275, 276. See also pp. 103, 115.
6 Ibid., p. 129.

than to make faith do duty for evidence which is lacking."[1] Faith is not a matter of believing this or that without sufficient evidence. It "is not an act of cognitive affirmation within the subject-object structure of reality," and so is not "subject to verification by experiment."[2] But all of this concern for verification of belief becomes irrelevant once it is recognized what faith actually is. Formally speaking, faith is the state of being grasped by concern for the ultimate in being and meaning, it is the state of ultimate concern. Tillich notes that "the term 'ultimate concern' unites a subjective and an objective meaning: somebody is concerned about something he considers of concern. In this formal sense of faith as ultimate concern, every human being has faith,...however unworthy the ultimate concern's concrete content may be."[3] Theology, therefore, must proceed from a formal to a material description of faith - faith with Christian content. From the material standpoint, faith is the state of ultimate concern for the New Being - the unambiguous life manifest

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1 Ibid., p. 131.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., p. 130. See also Tillich, Dynamics of Faith, pp. 1 f.

in Jesus who is therefore called the Christ.[1] Faith is concern for meaning under the uniting impact of meaning-itself.

The unambiguous life which is the Christian's ultimate concern is best characterized as love, agape. Love is to be understood as "the drive toward the reunion of the separated."[2] It is the longing of a being to be united with other beings, and with the Ground of Being - it is the longing to unite fragmentary, finite meaning with meaning-itself. This description of love as the drive toward reunion of the separated is accurate on every level in which love is a reality, it is true of epithymia (desire), eros (aspiration toward value), philia (friendship), and agape (unambiguous love, love conquering existential distortion).[3] "The drive for reunion belongs to the essential structure of life and, consequently, is experienced as pleasure, joy, or blessedness, according to the different dimensions of life" (organic, self-awareness, spirit).[4] Agape, in so far as it is

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1 Ibid., p. 131.
2 Ibid., p. 134. See also Tillich, Love, Power and Justice, pp. 25, 26.
3 Ibid., p. 137.
4 Ibid., p. 136.

experienced as a gift, given by the Divine Spirit, is described as "grace."[1] However, in so far as it is an actuality in human life it is embraced as an act of free decision by the human spirit. Without such free decision it would not be unambiguous love. The Divine Spirit does not disrupt the freedom of the human spirit, but beyond the subject-object structure, it moves within it. Agape, then, is the unambiguous reunion of meaning-itself with a finite bearer of meaning, actualized in every dimension of human life according to the structure appropriate to that dimension.

> The Spiritual Presence, elevating man through faith and love to the transcendent unity of unambiguous life, creates the New Being above the gap between essence and existence and consequently above the ambiguities of life.[2]

The New Being is this possibility for a man in which his actual existence expresses his potential, or his essence. However, New Being is different from mere essence in that it is "realized only after estrangement, contest, and decision."[3] Therefore, it is in fact New Being as over against the merely "dreaming innocence" character of pure essence.[4]

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1 Ibid., p. 211.
2 Ibid., p. 138.
3 Ibid., p. 129.
4 Ibid.

In this New Being of faith and love man realizes his true "humanity,"[1] and the meaning of his life. For, in the New Being the spirit of man is freely united with the Divine Spirit, and the meaning of human life is brought into creative correspondence with meaning-itself, the Divine *logos*.

The realization of the New Being in human life can also be described by the traditional term "salvation" - which is itself to be identified with the *telos*, God's aim for his creativity.[2] Tillich finds a constructive suggestion in the original latin *salvus*, i.e. "healed." Salvation, understood as healing "corresponds to the state of estrangement as the main characteristic of existence. In this sense, healing means reuniting that which is estranged,... overcoming the split between God and man, man and his world, man and himself....It includes, above all, the fulfillment of the ultimate meaning of one's existence."[3] God's *telos* for man is that he should be "healed," and therefore be a new being, a new bearer of meaning, through the strength of the New Being, meaning-itself (beyond

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1 *Ibid.*, p. 67.
2 *Ibid.*, II, 165.
3 *Ibid.*, p. 166.

the subject-object structure).

Because of the polarity of individualisation and participation, and because of the multidimensional unity of creation, the question of New Being and salvation are only properly understood in a cosmic, universal perspective. The implications of the polarity of individualisation and participation will be further considered under Part IV of this chapter.[1] But, regarding the multidimensional unity of life, Romans 8:19-22 suggests to Tillich that "man and nature belong together in their created glory, in their tragedy, and in their salvation."[2] For just this reason the finite freedom of man, and how he uses it, takes on "cosmic" rather than just individual or even human significance.[3] For "what happens to man happens implicitly to all realms..., for in man all levels of being are present."[4] Indeed, "there is no salvation of man if there is no salvation of nature, for man is in nature and nature is in man."[5] Thus, in considering salvation, theology is driven

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1 See p. 418 f. this paper.
2 Tillich, The Shaking of the Foundations, p. 83.
3 Tillich, Systematic Theology, II, 121.
4 Ibid.
5 Tillich, The Shaking of the Foundations, p. 84.

to the eschatological symbol of "cosmic healing."[1]

So it is that the telos of man is to be understood. The Divine Creativity "throws"[2] man into existence, and so into existential estrangement in which he stands over against God. This act is confirmed by man in actualizing his finite freedom. But this is not an end in itself, nor is it in vain. In existential estrangement man has the possibility of emerging an individual, and more than an individual, as a person, conquering estrangement in communion with other persons. Such "conquering" is made possible through the presence and power of the Divine Spirit, operative beyond the subject-object structure, creating New Being within the old conditions of existence. The meaning of human life for God is to be found in the emergence of new beings which stand over against him, but also, in freedom, and in the strength of the New Being, with him, and therefore also with one another - thus uniting the meaning of human existence with meaning-itself. The emergence of the New Being is

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1 Tillich, Systematic Theology, II, 167. An excellent discussion of the universal implications of a "redemptive faith" is to be found in Alan D. Galloway's The Cosmic Christ (London: Nisbet & Co. Ltd., 1951). Galloway indicates his indebtedness to Tillich, p. xii.

2 Tillich makes reference to Heidegger, Ibid., I, 196; II, 73.

fulfilment - it is salvation - it is "realized eschatology."[1] Its significance is not limited to individual men, or even to mankind in general, for it embraces the "cosmos." "The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God."[2]

III

How does a man actualise his existence in the New Being, how does he come concretely to realise the meaning of his particular life? The individual or vocational dimension of the question of the meaning of life is intensified within the structure of Tillich's thought because of the great emphasis he places upon individuality. How does a man actually achieve personal meaning within the context of the general, teleological answer?

The approach to Tillich's answer to the vocational dimension of the question emerges from his description of the polarity of freedom and destiny.[3]

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1 Ibid., II, 119. Georges Florovsky suggest the term "inaugurated eschatology" in his essay "Revelation and Interpretation" in Biblical Authority for Today ed. by Alan Richardson (London: SCM Press, 1951) p. 180.

2 Rom. 8:19.

3 See p. 382 this paper. See also Karl Heim, "Der Schicksalsgedanke als Ausdruck fur das Suchen der Zeit," Glaube und Leben (Berlin: Jan Furche-Verlag, 1928), pp. 406-429.

Destiny is to be understood not as a strange fate, but as "myself, as given," including heredity, history, environment, and individuality.[1] As such, it is "not the opposite of freedom but rather...its conditions and limits," providing and defining the very content which makes deliberation and decision possible.[2] Freedom is what a man does with his destiny, how he helps to shape it, how he lives within it. The possibility of personal meaning appears at precisely this point: where a man, within the limits and opportunities of his destiny, decides, in freedom, to live meaningfully. Such an act of freedom involves "deliberation" (in which the possibilities presented by one's destiny are considered), "decision" (in which certain possibilities are cut off in order that one, or others, may be embraced), and "responsibility" (in which a man stands accountable for his decisions).[3] The decision to (or not to) live meaningfully, and therefore also how one will (or will not) live meaningfully, is undertaken within the constellation of factors which his destiny presents to him for

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1 Tillich, Systematic Theology, I, 185.
2 Ibid., p. 184.
3 Ibid.

decision. God, in his providence, is present as a factor in that constellation providing neither interference nor a strange additional possibility, but rather "the quality of inner directedness present in every situation."[1] This quality is always present because man has his being in the ground of being, and therefore also in the logos - the ground of meaning. The guidance of providence is always present because man is grounded in its truth. "We know because we participate in the divine knowledge. Truth is not absolutely removed from the outreach of our finite minds....We experience the fragmentary character of all finite knowledge, but not as a threat against our participation in truth; and we experience the broken character of every finite meaning, but not as a cause for ultimate meaninglessness."[2]

The polarity of freedom and destiny (when it is understood that God's providence is present in man's destiny) opens to an individual the possibility of surrendering a fragment of his historical existence to God, to participate in a finite way, under the

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1 Ibid., p. 267.
2 Ibid., p. 279.

conditions of existence, in the eternal ground of meaning, the *logos*.[1] Of course, the precise *content* of the decision can never be made in a general way (by the theologian or by anyone else) because it is always particular, because the individual embraces personal meaning at just this point: where, *in freedom*, he decides how, within the unique constellation of possibilities presented to him by his destiny, he will actualize (or will not actualize) the Divine *logos*.

The polarity of freedom and destiny compose the *approach* to Tillich's answer to the question concerning the realization of individual meaning. The actual content of his answer is to be found at that point where the individual in freedom affirms and actualizes the divine possibility or possibilities presented to him by his destiny, and so *participates in the New Being*. Although a description of the content of the meaningful choice or choices open to an individual can not be given (because they are always *his* choices undertaken with *his* freedom in the context of *his* destiny), it is possible to undertake a phenomenology of man's participation in the

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1 *Ibid.*, p. 267.

New Being and so, in a general way, of man's existence in the *logos*.

The first thing to note concerning the individual's participation in the New Being is that "the Divine Spirit's invasion of the human spirit does not occur in isolated individuals but in social groups."[1] The polarity of individualization and participation determines that the appearance of the New Being is never an isolated phenomenon. The life of a man is a life in relationship with other men, and this fact conditions the way in which the New Being becomes actualized in human existence. The individual encounters the impact of the New Being already operative in (though not identical with) a historic, human community - the church.[2]

The encounter with the New Being, present in the Spiritual Community, is mediated through sacraments, the Word, or the "inner word" - any or all of these three. *Sacraments* are concrete events or objects from encountered reality mediating the Spiritual Presence. Their number can not be limited (anything *may* become sacramental), but the New Being

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1 *Ibid.*, III, 139.
2 *Ibid.*, pp. 219, 220.

as manifest in Jesus as the Christ is the criterion by which they must be judged, and by which the presence of the New Being can be truly recognized. The Word describes the way in which the Spiritual Presence uses human words so as to create ultimate concern for New Being. It is the medium most appropriate to man's existence as spirit - above the other (but still important) dimensions of life. The Word has a Christological criterion similar to that of the sacraments. The "inner word" in not an independent phenomenon without a medium, but "the refocusing into contemporary relevance of the words from traditions and former experiences. This refocusing occurs under the impact of the Spiritual Presence. The medium of the word is not excluded."[1]

For the individual who encounters the New Being there arises a decision concerning "the basic content of the Christian faith."[2] This decision is not a matter of believing this or that. Rather, "the criterion of one's belonging to a church and through it to the Spiritual Community is the serious desire, conscious or unconscious, to participate in

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1 Ibid., p. 128.
2 Ibid., p. 174.

the life of a group which is based on the New Being as it has appeared in Jesus as the Christ."[1] This corresponds to the description of faith as the state of ultimate concern for the New Being.[2]

According to Tillich, when the individual is in this state of ultimate concern for the New Being, operative in the Spiritual community, the ambiguities of existence, the structures of destruction, are for him "not eliminated but...conquered in principle."[3] Tillich hastens to explain that the phrase "in principle" does not mean simply in abstract, but refers to "the power of beginning, which remains the controlling power in a whole process."[4] Man's subsequent participation "can be described as the experience of the New Being as creating (regeneration), the experience of the New Being as paradox (justification), and the experience of the New Being as process (santification)."[5]

Man's participation in the New Being (and so in meaning) is experienced as creating - that is, "'grasping and drawing into itself,' producing the state which Paul called 'being in Christ,'" and

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1 Ibid., p. 175.
2 See p. 400 this paper.
3 Tillich, Systematic Theology, III, 172.
4 Ibid., p. 173.
5 Ibid., p. 221.

which orthodoxy called "regeneration."[1] Tillich is aware that "the question is often asked: If the Spiritual presence must grasp me and create faith in me, what can I do in order to reach such faith?"[2] His answer is that when the question

> is asked with existential seriousness, the answer is implied in the question, for existential seriousness is evidence of the impact of the Spiritual Presence upon an individual. He who is ultimately concerned about his state of estrangement and about the possibility of reunion with the ground and aim of his being [the meaning of his life] is already in the grip of the Spiritual Presence. In this situation the question, What shall I do to receive the Divine Spirit? is meaningless because the real answer is already given and any further answer would distort it.
>
> In practical terms this means that the merely polemical question concerning the way to reunion of the estranged cannot be answered and must be exposed in its lack of seriousness. Thus he who asks with ultimate concern should be told that the fact of his ultimate concern implies the answer and therefore that he is under the impact of the Spiritual Presence and accepted in his state of estrangement.[3]

Man's participation in the New Being (and so, in meaning) is experienced as paradox - that is, "justification by grace through faith." In the moral realm this means man's accepting the fact that he is accepted by God although he is unacceptable according to the law (his own essential being).

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1 Ibid., II, 177.
2 Ibid., III, 223.
3 Ibid.

Justification is this event in which all attempts at self salvation are abandoned and the grace of the new reality, which has the character of "in spite of," is accepted. It is, therefore, accepting the human situation in which, "in realtion to God, God alone can act and...no human claim" be it religious, moral or intellectual "can reunite us with him."[1] And yet, reunion is a possibility because God does act to reunite us, and our very concern for reunion is already evidence of his working in our lives. This same paradoxical principle applies also to the cognitive realm (rather than just to the moral), and with particular reference to the question of the meaning of life. "Since in the predicament of doubt and meaninglessness God... has disappeared, the only thing left (in which God reappears without being recognised) is the ultimate honesty of doubt and the unconditional seriousness of the despair about meaning. This is the way in which the experience of the New Being as paradox can be applied to the cognitive function."[2]

Man's participation in the New Being (and so,

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1 Ibid., p. 224.
2 Ibid., p. 228.

in meaning) is experienced as process - that is, "the experience of regeneration, qualified by the experience of justification, and developing as the experience of sanctification."[1] It is the "process in which the power of the New Being transforms personality and community, inside and outside the church," creating ever more meaningful lives.[2] Tillich suggests four principles recognisable in the process of sanctification, which together compose an "indefinite but distinguishable image of the 'Christian life.'"[3] They are increasing awareness, increasing freedom, increasing relatedness, and increasing transcendence.[4]

Growth in awareness involves increasing "sensitivity toward the demands of one's own growth, toward the hidden hopes and disappointments within others,...toward the grades of authenticity in the life of the spirit in others and oneself."[5] It includes awareness of the human situation, its finite possibilities and existential ambiguities. It implies increasing awareness of both meaning

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1 Ibid.
2 Ibid., II, 179, 180.
3 Ibid., III, 231.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid., p. 232.

and meaninglessness, and meaning in the midst of meaninglessness, within the ambiguities of historic existence.

Growth in freedom involves increasing liberation from slavery to objects, compulsions, and the law. Being reunited with his essence through the power of the New Being, a man's essence no longer stands over against his existence, commanding and judging. "Freedom from the law is the power to judge the given situation in the light of the Spiritual Presence and to decide upon adequate action."[1] It implies increasing freedom from the paralysing threat of meaninglessness, and the freedom (the courage and the power) to affirm meaning in the midst of meaninglessness.

Growth in relatedness involves increasing community because the power of the New Being is the reuniting power of agape. This fact "balances" the increase of freedom.[2] Such relatedness on the horizontal dimension is rooted in the vertical dimension, and the New Being in community finds its depth in the universal ground of being.[3] It implies

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1 Ibid.
2 Ibid., p. 233.
3 Ibid., p. 234.

increasing relatedness in meaningful community because of a fundamental unity of meaning and community in their eternal ground.

Growth in transcendence involves increasing maturity in the direction of the holy, increasing "devotion toward that which is ultimate."[1] Such "devotion" does not mean an increased religiosity. Indeed, "with increasing maturity in the process of sanctification the transcendence becomes more definite and its expressions more indefinite."[2] It is devotion to the holy present in the secular. It implies commitment to live meaningfully, in devotion to the meaningful, even in the midst of the meaningless.

Tillich notes that the process of sanctification - growth in awareness, freedom, relatedness, and transcendence - "always remains an up-and-down course - but in spite of its mutable character it contains a movement toward maturity."[3] There is growth toward a more meaningful life, toward unity with meaning-itself.

How does the individual actualize his existence

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1 Ibid., p. 236.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., p. 237.

in the New Being, how does he concretely realize the meaning of his particular life? The answer is approached by pointing to the polarity of freedom and destiny, for God's providence is present in every man's destiny, and every man's freedom gives him the capacity to decide for a meaning-ful choice. The qualitative possibility of a meaningful choice, however, occurs when a man encounters the Spiritual Community in which the power of the New Being is operative. There, he is given the opportunity to participate in the New Being, and so in meaning itself. This involves the individual in the experience of the New Being as creating concern for meaning, as paradox in so far as meaning is discovered to be present in the most meaningless situations, and as process or growth toward a more meaningful life. The Spiritual Presence, the New Being, the logos or meaning-itself is determinative in all of this.

IV

Tillich's insistence that the individual can actualize meaning-ful existence in the New Being only as he lives in relationship with other men -

that the polarity of individualization and participation has the negative possibility of loneliness and collectivity, and the positive possibility of personhood and communion - points to a profound appreciation of and sensitivity for the social dimension of the question of the meaning of life: What is the meaning of the individual's life for and in relation to the life of his neighbors? Tillich's answer to this will be considered in two sub-sections: the social and the historical.

Attention has already been called to the fact that, according to Tillich, the individual encounters the New Being in social groups.[1] In community, the meaning of the individual's life for and in relation to the life of his neighbor becomes actualized. This happens through morality, religion, and culture. These three are intimately related, and can only be considered separately for the sake of convenience.

Tillich understands morality as the continuously occurring act in which a man is constituted as a person in community. This qualitative possibility occurs for the individual in encounter with other

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1 See p. 410 this paper. Tillich, Systematic Theology, III, 139.

persons. Without the other person, the individual, "facing his world, has the whole universe as the potential content of his centered self." However, the human situation is such that "there is one limit to man's attempt to draw all content into himself - the other self." The other self is always an "unconditional limit" upon the claim of the individual - confronting him with a similar claim. The true constitution of the person, the true constitution of community, and therefore the true constitution of morality occurs when this self-confronting-self situation is adequately taken into account.[1] For, the essential nature of every man implies the "unconditional command to acknowledge him as a person."[2] Such an acknowledgement involves the acceptance of the other in his "particularities," and participation "in the center of the other self."[3] To refuse such acknowledgement means personal, moral, and spiritual disintegration for both individuals concerned.

Religion (considered in relation to morality) opens the individual to the qualitative, positive

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1 Tillich, Systematic Theology, III, 40.
2 Ibid., p. 45.
3 Ibid.

possibility of the moral situation by indicating to him that acceptance and participation can be undertaken in the strength of the Divine acceptance and participation, in the power of the New Being, in the presence of agape. To acknowledge the other is therefore the act of acknowledging the fundamental unity of every being in the ground of being, of every spirit in the Spiritual Presence. Such acknowledgement by the individual of the other person, such communion, calls for involvement with him in the negativities of existential estrangement. Such participation with the other person undertaken in the strength of the Divine participation is "suffering," or the "cross" - human sharing in "the atoning act of God."[1] The meaning of the individual's life for and in relation to the neighbor consists in this opportunity to share in the neighbor's sufferings and estrangement and, in the strength of the New Being, and within the ambiguities of existence, to overcome them, rendering them meaningful and redemptive. The depth of a meaningful life is only fathomed in the breadth of the common life, in the power and presence of the Divine Life.

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1 Ibid., II, 176.

Culture is the concrete actualization of this religiously grounded moral possibility, thus creating in community a meaningful world. To have a culture is "to cultivate" the moral possibilities of life in such a way that the lives (including the thoughts, achievements, sympathies, etc.) of individual persons within community become meaningful for one another. To have a culture is thus to receive, to nurture, and to create a "universe of meaning,"[1] which, because of the multidimensional unity of life, embraces in an "anticipatory and fragmentary" way the whole of reality.[2]

The "seriousness" of the moral situation - its possibilities for good and for evil - raises the question of the qualitative substance which is to become concrete content in culture.[3] Tillich's answer to this question is that "religion is the substance of culture, culture is the form of religion."[4] Or again, "religion as ultimate concern

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1 Ibid., p. 84; also p. 57.

2 Ibid., p. 85. For "concrete applications" of this rather limited formal definition - discussing language, artistic style, philosophy, psycho-analysis, science, ethics, and education - see Tillich, Theology of Culture, ed. by R.C. Kimball (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), chs. V-XI.

3 Tillich, Systematic Theology, II, 160.

4 Tillich, Theology of Culture, p. 42 and Systematic Theology, III, 158.

is the meaning-giving substance of culture, and culture is the totality of forms in which the basic concern of religion expresses itself."[1] In other words, the "universe of meaning" which is the concrete content of culture raises the question as to "what is the meaning of the creation of a universe of meaning?"[2] The theological answer is given by reference to the "inexhaustible depth of meaning in all meanings created by culture."[3] The universe of meaning which expresses itself in the horizontal direction is itself dependent upon the vertical direction. "Meaning cannot live without the inexhaustible source of meaning to which religion points."[4] Thus, the Spiritual Community (operative in but never limited to or identical with the churches) is composed of those who earnestly "seek to experience the ultimate in being and meaning through every cultural form and task,"[5] thereby communicating "the experience of holiness...in all its creations,"[6] operating according to "the principle of the consecration of the secular."[7]

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1 Tillich, Theology of Culture, p. 42.
2 Tillich, Systematic Theology, III, 84.
3 Ibid., p. 96.
4 Ibid., p. 97.
5 Ibid., p. 161.
6 Ibid., p. 251.
7 Ibid., p. 247.

Culture is the light of the Eternal *logos*, creatively refracted through true human community, illuminating the world with meaning.

The meaning of the individual's life for and in relation to the life of his neighbor becomes a serious question in the event of moral confrontation, receives its answer in the depths of religion, and expresses itself through community in the creation of culture.[1]

Because man's life in society is also a life in time, the question of the meaning of his life for and in relation to his neighbor must also be considered in relation to history. Tillich suggests that the symbol "Kingdom of God" is the answer to the question of the meaning of history, and the answer to the social dimension of the question of the meaning of life must be discovered by reference to it.[2]

Tillich describes the kingdom as having political, social, personal and universal implications.[3] His

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1 Of course, every such expression is ambiguous, subject to existential distortion. Ibid., p. 68 f.

2 Ibid., p. 356. The "Kingdom of God" is not, of course, a phenomenologically arrived at conclusion. (Ibid., p. 349.) It is the theological answer to the question implied in history, the question having been formulated through phenomenological or existential analysis.

3 Ibid., p. 358.

interpretation of history is extensive, and can not be considered at length here. The important aspect of his understanding of history for the social or ethical dimension of the question of the meaning of life emerges from his use of the New Testament idea concerning the kairos. This concept of the fullness-of-time expresses the conviction that a moment has "appeared which [is] pregnant with a new understanding of the meaning of history and life."[1] The actualization of a kairos involves the "production of new and unique embodiments of meaning" in history.[2] Of course, "awareness of a kairos is a matter of vision. It is not an object of analysis and calculation,"[3] though these will and should necessarily follow. For, a kairos may be demonically distorted or even erroneous. Therefore, it must always be subjected to testing by the "great kairos."[4] Furthermore, every concrete realization is subject to the ambiguities of existential distortion.[5] But this does not limit its historical importance or eternal significance.

The importance of a kairos consists in the fact that it opens the possibility for a relative

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1 Ibid., p. 369.
2 Ibid., p. 304.
3 Ibid., p. 370.
4 Ibid., p. 371.
5 Ibid., pp. 332, 339.

embodiment of the Kingdom of God in time and under the conditions of historical existence.[1] The Kingdom of God has this inner-historical side, when a community's "universe of meaning" (culture) approximates under the conditions of existence a finite union with, a manifestation in power of, the logos. "The transcendent is actual within the inner-historical," and only as the individual participates in the struggle for the inner historical actualization of the Kingdom, does he realize the meaning of his historical existence.[2] The "struggle" is important, for there is no guaranteed progress regarding the kingdom. Although progress in technology, science, education, and the overcoming of spatial divisions is a historical possibility, "there is no progress where human freedom is decisive,"[3] and there is no escape from the ambiguities of existence. Progress, therefore, is never to be identified with a historical realization of the Kingdom. The Kingdom only comes when human freedom, in the power of the

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1 "Perhaps one can say that the main impact of church history on world history is that it produces an uneasy conscience in those who have received the impact of the New Being but follow the ways of the old being. Christian civilization is not the Kingdom of God, but it is a continuous reminder of it. Ibid., p. 384.

2 Ibid., p. 392.

3 Ibid., pp. 333, 339, 354.

New Being, unites the present state of progress with its eternal meaning.

This fact and the ambiguities of every historical realization point to the transhistorical side of the symbol "Kingdom of God," which is identical with the End of History or Eternal Life.[1] "The aim of history does not lie in history."[2] The meaning of every historical kairos is only properly understood as "signifying" (pointing beyond itself to) "the meaning of being as such."[3] The meaning of the individual's life for and in relation to his neighbors - present, past, and future - is realized in the historical actualization of kairoi, the inner-historical realizations of the Kingdom of God, which themselves point beyond themselves to the Eternal Kingdom. Every historical embodiment of meaning suggests its Eternal source and Eternal aim. Thus the social dimension of the question of the meaning of life - considered in relation to history - leads to a consideration of the ultimate or eschatological dimension.

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1 Ibid., pp. 357, 359.
2 Ibid., p. 311.
3 Ibid., p. 304.

V

The importance of the ultimate or eschatological dimension of the question of the meaning of life appears when the question is asked: "What is the meaning of life in the perspective of death?" With more specific reference to the structure of Tillich's thought the question is: "Does not the fact of death indicate the conquering of being by non-being, and so the conquering of meaning by non-meaning - thus erasing the possibility of any ultimate meaning to life?" Tillich's answer to this question is developed in the context of what is surely one of the most elaborate doctrines of eternal life in the whole of contemporary theology.[1]

In describing the existence of man, Tillich emphasizes the importance of recognising death as the end of the matter. "Man's time comes to an end with himself."[2] Theology must be honest in confronting the existentially obvious. "Everybody is aware of the complete loss of self which biological extinction implies."[3] Tillich can speak of the

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1 Ibid., pp. 394-423. See Barth p.64 f. this paper.
2 Ibid., II, 78.
3 Tillich, The Courage to Be, p. 42.

"stigma" which hangs over man's existence because "he comes from nothing, and he returns to nothing."[1] Any doctrine which would claim for man some type of natural immortality must be rejected. The concept of the "immortal soul" has its origin on Greek rather than Hebrew soil.[2] Man is naturally mortal; he has a beginning and an end; this is what it means to be finite.[3]

This does not, however, mean for Tillich that man's situation is hopeless.[4] There is, indeed, the possibility of hope. But that hope is not in finite man as he, in fact, exists. Rather, it is in God, who as the ground of being and the ground of meaning is also the ground of hope. "The doubt about truth and meaning which is the heritage [and implication] of finitude" need not lead to despair.[5] "We experience the broken character of every finite meaning, but not as a cause for ultimate meaninglessness."[6] Fulfilment of the ultimate meaning of one's existence is yet a possibility - but a possibility with the paradoxical character of "in spite

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1 Tillich, Systematic Theology, II, 66.
2 Ibid., I, 188; II, 66, 67.
3 Ibid., I, 189.
4 Ibid., p. 254.
5 Ibid., p. 279.
6 Ibid.

of."[1] God gives this "in spite of" character of man's faith the assurance that "no situation whatsoever can frustrate the fulfilment of his ultimate destiny."[2] It is of the nature of faith that, "just when the conditions of a situation are destroying the believer, the divine condition gives him a certainty which transcends the destruction."[3] "In order to be certain of one's fulfilment, one can and must look at God's activity alone."[4] For, "one can become confident about one's existence only after ceasing to base one's confidence on oneself."[5]

Tillich knows that "the existential awareness of one's finitude...poses the question of whether the continuation of finite existence is worth the burden of it."[6] His answer is that "the fragmentary victories of the Kingdom of God in history point by their very character to the non-fragmentary side of the Kingdom of God 'above' history. But even 'above' history, the Kingdom of God is related to history; it is the 'end' of history," in the sense of goal.[7]

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1 Ibid., p. 269.
2 Ibid., p. 267.
3 Ibid., p. 268.
4 Ibid., p. 286.
5 Tillich, The Courage to Be, p. 163.
6 Tillich, Systematic Theology, III, 57.
7 Ibid., p. 394.

"The fulfilment of history [and of the individual] lies in the permanently present end of history, which is the transcendent side of the Kingdom of God: the Eternal Life."[1]

Tillich attempts to conceptualise his thought in terms of a "diagram which in some way unites the qualities of 'coming from,' 'going ahead,' and 'rising to.'" He suggests "a curve which comes from above, moves down as well as ahead, reaches the deepest point which is the nunc existentiale, the 'existential now,' and returns in an analogous way to that from which it came, going ahead as well as going up. This curve can be drawn in every moment of experienced time, and it can also be seen as the diagram for temporality as a whole."[2] This is a continuous process. "There is always creation and consummation, beginning and end."[3]

The importance of this creation-consummation curve for the question of the meaning of life lies in Tillich's belief that "between beginning and end ...the new is created."[4] This "new" is what a man

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1 Ibid., p. 396. Underlining mine.
2 Ibid., p. 420.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., p. 398. Underlining mine. See also p. 394 this paper.

has done with his life, under the conditions of existence, moving within the polarity of his freedom and his destiny.[1] "The new which has been actualized in time and space adds something to essential being, uniting it with the positive which is created within existence, thus producing the ultimately new, the 'New Being,'...as a contribution to the Kingdom of God in fulfilment."[2] Thus Tillich can speak of essentialization, in which "participation in the eternal life depends on a creative synthesis of a being's essential nature with what it has made of it in its temporal existence."[3] There is the movement "from essence through existential estrangement to essentialization."[4]

At this point Tillich introduces his understanding of "judgement." He does so by reference to the Greek word krinein, "to separate."[5] His point is that the end of history implies the separation of the good from the bad, the true from the false, the accepted from the rejected, the meaningful from the meaningless.[6]

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1 Ibid., p. 406.
2 Ibid., p. 401.
3 Ibid., pp. 400, 401.
4 Ibid., p. 421.
5 Ibid., p. 398.
6 Ibid., p. 398.

> The ever present end of history elevates the positive content of history into eternity at the same time that it excludes the negative from participation in it. Therefore nothing which has been created in history is lost, but it is liberated from the negative element with which it is entangled within existence....Eternal life...includes the positive content of history, liberated from its negative distortions and fulfilled in its potentialities.[1]

What is true for history is also true for the individual. "In so far as the negative has maintained possession of [the individual], it is exposed in its negativity and excluded from eternal memory. Whereas, in so far as the essential has conquered existential distortion its standing is higher in eternal life."[2] This fact gives "an infinite weight to every decision" a man makes,[3] because "the exposure of the negative as negative in a person may not leave much positive for Eternal Life."[4] It is only a man's positive participation in the historical kingdom which, in unity with his essence, is exalted to Eternal Life.

Tillich's thought on this matter seeks to combine creatively the seriousness implied in the New Testament understanding of judgement, and the hope

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1 Ibid., p. 397.
2 Ibid., p. 401; also II, 87.
3 Ibid., III, 401.
4 Ibid., p. 406. One need not be anxious, however, concerning one's historical failures. "For God the past is not complete, because through it he creates the future; and, in creating the future, he re-creates the past." (Ibid., I, 276.)

for the apokatastasis panton (the restitution of everything).[1] "Absolute judgements over finite beings or happenings are impossible, because they make the finite infinite. This is the truth in theological universalism."[2] It follows from the facts that: (1) no human being is unambiguously good or bad; (2) since creation is itself good, grounded in God, nothing within it can become completely evil; (3) the polarity of individualization and participation along with that of freedom and destiny determine that no man exists as an isolated individual, but only as an individual whose life is indissolubly related to others.[3] Therefore, "the division of mankind into fulfilled and unfulfilled individuals...is...theologically impossible."[4] Theology must seek a creative unity of judgement with the apokatastasis panton which is worthy to be called salvation (understood as healing).

The New Testament speaks of eternal salvation through the symbol of the "resurrection." "The resurrection says mainly that the Kingdom of God includes all dimensions of being. The whole personality

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1 Ibid., p. 407.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., pp. 408, 409; also I, 270, 271.
4 Ibid., I, 270, 271.

participates in Eternal Life....Man's psychological, spiritual, and social being is implied in his bodily being - and this in unity with the essences of everything else that has being."[1] Of course, "in life universal the dimension of spirit is actualised only in anticipation."[2] Therefore, it is in and through man that the quest for ultimate meaning comes to full realisation. The multidimensional unity of life determines that the whole of creation - nature and history - participate through man in Eternal Life. "What happens to man happens implicitly to all realms..., for in man all levels of being are present."[3] Salvation implies "cosmic healing."[4]

But the resurrection also "includes a strong affirmation of the eternal significance of the individual person's uniqueness."[5] It is through the physical body that the individuality of a person is expressed and his essence actually exists.[6] The resurrection of the body implies that salvation for

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1 Ibid., III, 413. Tillich discusses the resurrection of Jesus in Ibid., II, 153-165.
2 Ibid., pp. 308, 305.
3 Ibid., II, 121. Also III, 405.
4 Ibid., II, 167; also p.403 f.this paper.
5 Ibid., III, 413.
6 Tillich notes that "portraits, if they are authentic works of art, mirror what we have called 'essentialization' in artistic anticipation." Ibid.

the individual is a "true reality."[1]

> The self-conscious self cannot be excluded from Eternal Life. Since Eternal Life is life and not undifferentiated identity and since the Kingdom of God is the universal actualization of life, the element of individualization cannot be eliminated or the element of participation would also disappear. There is no participation if there are no individual centers to participate; the two poles condition each other....The dimension of the spirit which in all its functions presupposes self-consciousness cannot be denied eternal fulfilment, just as eternal fulfilment cannot be denied to the biological dimension.[2]

On the other hand, "the self-conscious self in Eternal Life is not what it is in temporal life," subject to the ambiguities and conditioning of categorical finitude.[3] It is not as we know it. It is "transformation." "We shall all be changed."[4]

When Tillich speaks of Eternal Life, however, he is not thinking of additional life processes running parallel to that of God. Rather, he has in mind an "eschatological pan-en-theism."[5] "Eternal life is life in the eternal, life in God" (when "in" is understood as indicating <u>origin</u>, <u>dependence</u> and <u>fulfilment</u>).[6] At this point Tillich recognises the bankruptcy of all conceptual language, and the need

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1 <u>Ibid</u>., p. 400.
2 <u>Ibid</u>., pp. 413, 414.
3 <u>Ibid</u>., p. 414.
4 I Cor. 15:51.
5 Tillich, <u>Systematic Theology</u>, III, 421.
6 <u>Ibid</u>., p. 420.

for "the highest religious-poetic symbolism."[1] "With a bold metaphor one could say that the temporal, in a continuous process, becomes 'eternal memory.' But eternal memory is living retention of the remembered thing...[and implies] true reality."[2] The individual exists as a living "cell" in the Divine mind. A more Biblical image is that of the "Heavenly Jerusalem," understood "as a city in which there is no temple because God lives there."[3] There is the even more satisfactory Pauline statement that "from him and through him and to him are all things,"[4] and therefore in the consummation God will be "everything to everyone."[5] The important point to grasp is that the question of the meaning of life must finally be understood theocentrically and therefore dialectically. For, "the world process means something to God," and "the eternal dimension of what happens in the universe is the Divine Life itself." This follows from the fact that "a world which is only external to God and not also internal to Him, in the last

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1 Ibid., p. 421.
2 Ibid., pp. 399, 400.
3 Ibid., p. 403.
4 Romans 11:36.
5 I Cor. 15:28.

consideration, is a divine play of no essential concern for God." Therefore, "our final consideration points in the opposite direction [from the meaning of man's life] and speaks of God in his relation to man and his world. Such a view of eternal life as life in God "sharply transcends a merely anthropocentric as well as a merely cosmocentric theology and expresses a theocentric vision of the meaning of existence."[1]

VI

The extent to which the theme of meaning and meaninglessness appears in the various writings of Tillich gives some index of his intense concern over the question.[2] Indeed, he understands it as the problem of our time. While ancient civilization was marked by anxiety over eternal life, and the middle ages by anxiety over moral guilt, modern

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1 Tillich, Systematic Theology, III, 422. Underlining mine.

2 This additional section, which could have been included as part of the individual or vocational dimension, is separated because of the extensive consideration which Tillich gives to meaninglessness in relation to radical doubt.

man is anxious about the meaning of his existence.[1] The third anxiety is the more radical, for the former two imply "an ultimate responsibility," whereas the third is determined by apprehension lest responsibility and meaning be "swallowed" in the "abyss" of non-being.[2] The result in confronting the relative questions of life is the experience of "emptiness," and in confronting the absolute question of life the experience of "meaninglessness." For "in the background of emptiness lies meaninglessness as death lies in the background of the vicissitudes of fate." Modern man is troubled by "anxiety about the loss of an ultimate concern, of a meaning which gives meaning to all meanings..., by the loss of a spiritual center, of an answer, however symbolic and indirect, to the question of the meaning of his existence."[3] Of course, the problem has also been experienced in former ages, because it is and has always been implied in "man's existential predicament." It would be a mistake,

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1 Tillich, The Courage to Be, pp. 57, 173. Tillich finds the problem well expressed in contemporary art forms. "Art indicates what the character of a spiritual situation is....Its symbols have something of a revelatory character." The Religious Situation (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1932), p. 53.

2 Ibid., p. 174.

3 Ibid., p. 47.

therefore, to suppose that social or historical changes could alter this basic situation.[1] But from the universal predicament of existence, the problem of meaninglessness is the _particular_ historical manifestation which characterises our time.

In view of this situation, Tillich asks: "Is there a kind of faith which can exist together with doubt and meaninglessness?"[2] Or, "if life is as meaningless as death..., on what can one base the courage to be?"[3] He thus expresses the personal courage to pursue the further implied question: what if his own theological answers should be doubted and found to be meaningless?

Tillich's answer to this question begins by accepting "as its precondition, the state of meaninglessness."[4] The man who "is in the grip of doubt and meaninglessness" must not be asked to remove himself from this situation and accept another. "That is just what cannot be done."[5] Instead, there must be found "an answer which is valid within and not outside the situation of his despair."[6] But the

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1 Tillich, _Systematic Theology_, II, 74.
2 Tillich, _The Courage to Be_, p. 174.
3 _Ibid._, pp. 174, 175.
4 _Ibid._
5 _Ibid._
6 _Ibid._ The following thoughts are obviously a development of Tillich's understanding of the doctrine of _justification_ as paradox, p. 413f. this paper.

acceptance of such a precondition determines that there is only "one possible answer"; "The seriousness of your despair is the expression of the meaning in which you are still living."[1] True, "in this situation the meaning of life is reduced to despair about the meaning of life. But as long as this despair is an act of life it is positive in its negativity....The act of accepting meaninglessness is in itself a meaningful act," because, "even in the despair about meaning being affirms itself through us."[2] Therefore, such concern must be acknowledged as itself a religious act, "and on the boundary line of the courage to be."[3]

The outstanding characteristic of such faith is that it is necessarily (i.e. by definition) marked by "no special content."[4] It must be understood as "simply faith, undirected, absolute. It is undefinable, since everything defined is dissolved by doubt

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1 Tillich, The Protestant Era, p. xxx. "Indifference toward the ultimate question is the only imaginable form of atheism." For, "where there is ultimate concern, God can be denied only in the name of God....Ultimate concern cannot deny its own character as ultimate." Tillich, Dynamics of Faith, pp. 45, 46.

2 Tillich, The Courage to Be, p. 176.

3 Ibid., p. 175.

4 Ibid. "Sometimes doubt conquers faith, but it still contains faith. Otherwise it would be indifference." Tillich, Dynamics of Faith, p. 100.

and meaninglessness."[1] Tillich describes this situation as "absolute faith" because "it is the situation on the boundary of man's possibilities. It *is* this boundary."[2] As such, it is not a situation of comfort, "it is not a place where one can live."[3] Indeed, "it is without the safety of words and concepts, it is without a name, a church, a cult, a theology."[4] It is *ab-solute* faith, faith confronting the void. But this does not mean that it is without an "objective foundation," or that it is merely "an eruption of subjective emotions."[5] Tillich points to three elements which compose the objective foundation of "absolute faith." First, he points to "the power of being which is present even in the face of the most radical manifestation of non-being." Its correlate is "a hidden meaning within the destruction of meaning."[6] Second, Tillich points to "the dependence of the experience of non-being on the experience of being" and its correlate, "the dependence of the experience of meaninglessness on the experience of meaning."[7]

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1 *Ibid.*
2 *Ibid.*, p. 189.
3 *Ibid.*
4 *Ibid.*
5 *Ibid.*, p. 176.
6 *Ibid.*, p. 177.
7 *Ibid.*

Third, "absolute faith" includes "the acceptance of being accepted," which is rooted in the experience of being supported by being even while aware of the infinite transcendence of being itself.[1] It is accepting "oneself as accepted in spite of one's despair about the meaning of this acceptance"; it is "the accepting of...acceptance without somebody or something that accepts,"[2] other than the "power of acceptance" implied in the continued presence of the "power of being" in personal existence. It is "the courage to be...rooted in the God who appears when God has disappeared in the anxiety of doubt."[3]

Such a "contentless faith" in the "God above God" - the God who is present when the God of the theologians "has disappeared in the abyss of meaninglessness with every other value and meaning"[4] - should be an intimate concern of "the Church under the cross...," for it is itself founded upon "the Crucified who cried to God who remained his God after the God of confidence had left him in the darkness of doubt and meaninglessness."[5]

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1 Ibid.
2 Ibid., p. 185.
3 Ibid., p. 190.
4 Ibid., p. 187.
5 Ibid., p. 188.

Although often delving deeply in the depths of despair, Tillich, in considering the same subject matter, is also able to rise to heights of genuine joy. This is because of the very nature of joy which in Tillich's thought is the experience of fulfilling the meaning of one's life. "Joy is nothing else than the awareness of our being fulfilled in our true being, in our personal center."[1] Of course, such fulfilment involves moving beyond "absolute faith." It involves the whole of the theological answer to the question of meaning being translated into life. When he speaks of fulfilment, Tillich presupposes persons in communion with other persons, "healed" through the power of the New Being, moving toward Eternal Life. But such an answer can only mean joy if it is identical with reality itself, because "it is reality that gives joy, and reality alone."[2] Indeed, "joy is born out of union with reality itself." This is the meaning of the Biblical injunction to rejoice: "penetrate from what seems to be real to that which is really real."[3] Fulfilment of the meaning of life and joy

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1 Tillich, The New Being (London: SCM Press, 1956), p. 146.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.

belong together. "In fulfilment and joy the inner aim of life, the meaning of creation, and the end of salvation, are attained."[1]

The description of Tillich's analysis of and answer to the question of the meaning of life is here ended. There remains only to be noted the quiet conclusion which Tillich himself makes:

> Fate overshadows the Christian world, as it overshadowed the ancient world two thousand years ago. The individual man passionately asks that he be allowed the possibility of believing in a personal fulfilment in spite of the negativity of his historical existence. And the question of historical existence again has become a struggle with the darkness of fate; it is the same struggle in which originally the Christian victory was won.[2]

VII

Tillich's answer to the question of the meaning of life may be summarized in the following points:

I. God's purpose for human life is to be found in the emergence of new beings - individual persons living in community with other persons through the presence and power of the New Being. The New Being - the Divine Spirit operative beyond the subject-object

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1 Ibid.
2 Tillich, Systematic Theology, I, 266.

structure in human spirits - thus unites the meaning of human existence with meaning-itself, the divine *logos*. The joy of a meaningful life is born out of this union with reality.

II. The individual actualises meaningful existence when, in encounter with the Spiritual Community, he freely participates in the New Being and so in meaning-itself. For the individual this freely embraced participation involves the experience of the New Being as *creating* concern for meaning, as *paradox* in so far as meaning is discovered to be present in the most meaningless situations, and as *process* or power of growth toward a more meaningful life.

III. The meaning of the individual's life for and in relation to his neighbor becomes a serious question in the event of *morality* (confrontation of person with person), receives its answer in *religion* (providing the depth of meaning in all existential meaning), and expresses itself through community in the creation of *culture* (the existential, meaningful world). At those times within history when a community's "universe of meaning" (culture) approximates a finite union with the divine *logos*, the

inner-historical side of the Kingdom of God has come. Every such historically actualized kairos, however, is subject to the ambiguities of existential distortion. The ambiguities of every historical realization thus point beyond themselves to the trans-historical side of the Kingdom, Eternal Life.

IV. The ultimate goal for the individual person is life in the eternal, life in God - thus indicating that the question of the meaning of human life must finally be answered in terms of its meaning for God. The essence of the individual person, in unity with its positive and creative participation in meaningful existence, but separated from its negative participation in meaninglessness, is lifted to life in Him. Because of the multidimensional unity of life, such "resurrection" to "salvation" must be understood not simply in terms of the individual (though it is consummated in and through him), but in terms of "cosmic healing" (including nature, history, society and the individual).

Tillich's answer to the question of the meaning of life is certainly not beyond criticism, and

several studies and evaluations of his general thought, undertaken from various theological perspectives, have appeared in recent years.[1] The most obvious point of challenge for the question of the meaning of life concerns Tillich's use of abstract, "essentialist," theological symbols which, after a rather realistic and convincing existential analysis, suggest an appeal to the "beyond" - an appeal which, for many, may render his theological answers themselves "beyond" meaning. Such terms as "being," "depth," "essence," "logos," "meaning," "New Being," and "Spiritual Presence," have a numinous character in Tillich's thought which transcends every definition, and, under pressure for precision, can become amorphous almost to the point

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1 R. Allan Killen, The Ontological Theology of Paul Tillich, (J.H. Kok N.V. Kampen, 1956) from a conservative perspective; Kenneth Hamilton, The System and the Gospel (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1963) from a kerygmatic perspective; George H. Tavard, Paul Tillich and the Christian Message, (London: Burns & Oates, 1961) from a Roman Catholic perspective; J. Heywood Thomas, Paul Tillich: An Appraisal (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1963) from the perspective of linguistic analysis. Also, of course, the excellent Festschrift, Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall, eds., The Theology of Paul Tillich (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1959).

of infinity.[1] Nevertheless, Tillich's reference to the "beyond" in which every theological symbol supposedly participates[2] should not be understood as an appeal by him to an arbitrary authority which can in turn be converted into "true" propositions and made a substitute for realistic thought. Tillich never substitutes dogmatic caprice for the canons of experience, honestly evaluated. To him, the transcendent, numinous quality of these theological symbols is simply identical with reality, describing when possible, but mediating beyond the possibilities of description, his experience of it. His symbols are understood by him to be more than concepts because they actually participate in and mediate that which is more than can be conceptualized. Therefore, rather than simply criticise Tillich's thought because of the numinous and sometimes

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1 However, Kenneth Hamilton notes, rightly, that "the key to reading Tillich with understanding lies in the ability to interpret apparently simple and obvious words in terms of the system." (Op. cit., p. 17). "In deciding how...to understand any one term, his readers have to be guided less by the term itself...than by their knowledge of his system." (Ibid.). "Those who try to interpret Tillich without taking his words in the context of the system that shapes them, of course, are likely to produce conflicting results. But Tillich can hardly be blamed for that." (Ibid., p. 34).

2 Tillich, Systematic Theology, I, 122-123, 238-247; II, 9. Also, p. 367 this paper.

nebulous character of his major concepts, his entire theological structure must be understood in these terms. They are not hazy areas in his thinking, in need of clarification, but an intentional and fundamental part of the theological system itself. Tillich's

> is a theology of the spirit. It is mystical experience...which underlies all his theology.[1]

This underlying mysticism which determines the nature of Tillich's thought - appearing most obviously in the mood-quality of his sermons, but with lucid conceptual clarity in his constructive theological works - is its glory and its weakness, and personal decisions concerning the acceptability of his answer to the question of the meaning of life

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1 Walter Leibrecht, "The Life and Mind of Paul Tillich," Religion and Culture. Essays in Honour of Paul Tillich (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1959), pp. 19, 20. These essays are not intended to explore Tillich's theology. Note, for example, Tillich's attempt to bring to conceptual clarity his conspicuously mystical thought concerning the presence of the Divine Spirit in the human spirit beyond the subject-object structure. p. 398 this paper. It is important to observe, however, that this mysticism has an ontological-panentheistic, and not a supranatural-dualistic character for Tillich.

must finally be decided on this basis.[1]

Although it is not possible to determine apart from personal conviction whether Tillich's theological answers have the power "which arises from the coercive element in reality,"[2] it is possible to point to and appreciate the fact that Tillich's answer to the question of the meaning of life is systematically comprehensive - embracing in its consideration man's experience of himself as: a rational realistic creature who seeks (and needs) to avoid arbitrariness, and is concerned to be informed by evidence to the extent that it is possible; a self-transcendent creature who asks for an interpretation of his world; an historical

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1 A physician, Hal B. Richerson, M.D., recently wrote in The Christian Century: "For a man involved in life's ambiguities, no one speaks to the point as Tillich does. Perhaps to the analytic philosopher the question of life's meaning is irrelevant; to the academic theologian wrapped up in logic, mathematics and semantics, life may have no ambiguities or questions. But to the layman, struggling with life's frustrations and joys, shaken by doubt, attempting to find significance in his Christian heritage, Tillich's apologetics is God-sent. What Christian thinker is in closer communication with 20th century man?" Published as an open letter in The Christian Century, LXXXI, No. 11 (March 11, 1964), 344.

2 Edgar P. Dickie, God is Light: Studies in Revelation and Personal Conviction (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1953), p. 37. This section on "personal conviction" is certainly among the most excellent passages in contemporary theology.

creature who seeks to understand the relationship of his present to his and his world's past and future; a natural creature, seeking to interpret his relationship to the physical universe; and a spiritually sensitive creature aware of and wondering about the numinous in all his encounter with reality - and therefore the answer most qualified to be described as a "full" answer to the question of meaning, the answer which is the most meaning-ful. Indeed, Tillich's answer to the question of the meaning of life has the distinction that it has first understood the question; it seeks to present an edifying description of the relationship of the experiences which compose life to one another and to their source and goal - hence, their meaning, and the meaning of life. Therefore, whether or not Tillich's answer is judged to be personally satisfying, it is sufficiently comprehensive in breadth and depth to qualify as the answer which, from among those theologians studied, is most truly an answer. This arises from the fact that Tillich's is truly systematic theology, comprehensively undertaken.

In Kenneth Hamilton's criticism of Tillich in The System and the Gospel it is, as Tillich himself

notes, "the fact of the system itself, more than anything stated within the system, [which] is characterized as the decisive error."[1] According to Hamilton, Tillich's is not just systematic thinking, but "thinking in a system."[2] The distinction, which Hamilton finds edifying, leads him to the remarkable judgement that Tillich "is not standing on the ground of Christian faith but within the presuppositions of his system,"[3] that his "system as a whole is...incompatible with the Christian gospel,"[4] and therefore "something the believer has to meet with a 'No!'"[5]

It is not the purpose of the present study to defend Tillich against such criticism.[6] There can be little doubt that Hamilton succeeds in showing that the pneumatic freedom of the New Testament is somewhat brought to heel within the discipline of Tillich's system. It does not, however, follow that this is unambiguously undesirable. It may be both good and necessary, especially for those for whom submission to the canons of logical consistency

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1 Tillich, Systematic Theology, III, 3.
2 Hamilton, op. cit., p. 13.
3 Ibid., p. 218, note 1.
4 Ibid., p. 227.
5 Ibid.
6 Tillich is capable of defending himself. See Systematic Theology, I, 28-63; III, 3-7.

and intellectual honesty concerning personal experience have something of the character of repentance. Certainly the regularly recurring conclusions in the present study have pointed toward the desirability of a logically consistent and comprehensive theological system (not necessarily Tillich's), and so amount to an indirect defense of what is at least Tillich's intention - a defense, incidentally, grounded in the human situation, informed by human experience, concerning human life. It is, therefore, appropriate to observe that, in presenting his criticisms, Hamilton invokes (as his criterion) what he understands to be the kerygma (surely the magician's hat in theological polemics) against Tillich's thought with terrifying

certainty,[1] never stopping to ask whether Tillich's theology is a satisfactory and logical interpretation of human experience, or if his own criticisms compose a meaningful and believable alternative. It is a peculiar kind of mentality which draws a circle relegating another man's self-consciously Christian thought outside the realm of Christian

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1 See Karl Jaspers, The Perennial Scope of Philosophy (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1950), pp. 77, 78. "It is among the sorrows of my life, spent in the search for truth, that discussion with theologians always dries up at crucial points; they fall silent, state an incomprehensible proposition, speak of something else, make some categorical statement, engage in amiable talk, without really taking cognizance of what one has said - and in the last analysis they are not really interested. For on the one hand they are certain of their truth, terrifyingly certain; and on the other hand they do not regard it as worth while to bother about people like us, who strike them as merely stubborn. And communication requires listening and real answers, forbids silence or the evasion of questions; it demands above all that all statements of faith (which are after all made in human language and directed toward objects, and which constitute an attempt to get one's bearings in the world) should continue to be questioned and tested, not only outwardly, but inwardly as well. No one who is in definitive possession of the truth, can speak properly with someone else - he breaks off authentic communication in favour of the belief he holds." (Underlining mine).

These words of Jaspers, which strike with devastating force at the approach of Hamilton, are hardly appropriate to Tillich, and Jaspers contributed an essay, "The Individual and Mass Society," to Religion and Culture: Essays in Honour of Paul Tillich, pp. 37-43.

faith.[1] What seems to escape Hamilton completely is that Tillich's system is, in the final analysis, open and not closed - open theologically, intentionally turned toward and open to God. This is the function of Tillich's numinous language and of the determinative centrality of the New Being - to open the system to the presence of God as manifest in Jesus Christ.

There is no set of coronation by which Tillich's answer to the question of the meaning of life can be crowned, and pronounced universally satisfactory - for then, the question inevitably and appropriately would arise: for whose life is it a satisfactory answer, and how is this determined by others? Final conviction concerning such matters always - by the very nature of the question - moves in the realm of <u>personal</u> conviction. It can be shown, however, (and has been shown) that the question of the meaning of life is a question asking for a comprehensive and thoroughly believable interpretation of the relationship of the experiences which compose life to one

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1 It is, of course, in order that Hamilton should say that Tillich's system does not mediate the Spiritual Presence to him, and attempt to say why. But such obviously human discussion should not be permitted to assume the character of a categorical judgement.

another, and to their origin and goal. Tillich's Systematic Theology comes nearest to being an answer to this question. His integrity in facing problems of doubt, his sympathetic participation in the human situation, his willingness to check his theological answers with the questions of human experience, his loyalty to the power operative in the New Being, and (with particular reference to the problem of meaning) his comprehensive, systematic structure, with its scrupulous consistency and inter-relation of parts, makes Tillich's answer a highly qualified possibility.

At a time when theological and philosophical systems are not in vogue, Tillich has understood their desirability and necessity (at least for some people). It is, perhaps, not coincidental that the contemporary problem of meaninglessness is concurrent with a relative absence of theological and philosophical efforts at systematic construction. For, the existential question of the meaning of life is a question concerning a theological system. This fact will be considered at greater length in the general conclusion of this study.

CHAPTER VIII

Conclusion

I

The research undertaken so far has attempted: (1) to establish a more precise definition of the question of the meaning of life; (2) to survey the answers to the question as developed within the thoughts of six leading contemporary theologians; and (3) to suggest, by observing strengths and weaknesses, the kind of answer which, in the light of the more precisely defined question, is most truly a helpful answer.

In order to give the interrogation of each theologian a reasonably definite and uniform structure - without prejudicing the quest for a more precisely defined question as well as a helpful answer - the question of the meaning of life was broken down into four sub-questions or "dimensions" which represent the manifold breadth implied in the question as well as the major forms in which the question is often popularly expressed: What is God's purpose for human life? How does the individual come to realise a personal sense of meaning? What is the meaning of the individual's life for and in relation to the life of his neighbor? What is the meaning of life in the

perspective of death?

These sub-questions, however, were intended to have a preliminary character, helping to "get at" the actual subject matter, and in the summary of each theologian's answer, an attempt was made to outline the answer purely on the basis of the content of the answer, and not on the basis of the preliminary questions (except when that appeared to be appropriate). Naturally, the preliminary questions were never abandoned altogether, since they are intimately related to the question under research. But, for the purpose of the final summary of each theologian's thought, an attempt was made to win freedom for the theologian from the preliminary outline, in order that his answer might be expressed in a form more genuinely compatible with the general structure of his thought.

Throughout the research a new and more precise definition of the question has gradually emerged. This new definition does not replace the four sub-questions or "dimensions" of the primary question, but clarifies in a formal way the general structure implied whenever these sub-questions are asked. The question of the meaning of life is a question

asking for an interpretive description - which presents itself with the convincing force of fact because it corresponds to, is grounded in and informed by reality - of the manifold experiences which compose life, their relationship to one another, and to their source and goal. That the question is, therefore, asking for something that is not an easy or immediate possibility is obvious. But, serious attention to the actual question (as defined above) can go a long way toward suggesting an approach to a constructive answer.

II

A helpful answer to the question of the meaning of life must be believable, and believable not on the basis of credulity but on the basis of the convincing character of its content. It must, therefore, be more than simply believ-able (that which is able to be believed), it must be persuasive. An answer which does not by virtue of its content commend itself to belief is not a helpful answer. To be satisfactory, an answer must conform conceptually to facts and actualities in such a way as to produce "conviction

which arises from the coercive element in reality."[1] For, "religion loses its nerve when it ceases to believe that it expresses in some way truth about our relation to a reality beyond ourselves which ultimately concerns us."[2]

The summary and evaluation of Barth's answer to the question of the meaning of life substantially clarifies the problem under consideration.[3] Barth's program for developing theology as an independent science of "revelation" results in its independence from verification, so that it is impossible to determine whether or not his answer is true, whether or not it should be embraced by the intellect. The result is that the question of the meaning of life is

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1 Edgar P. Dickie, God is Light (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1933), p. 37.

2 Dorothy M. Emmet, The Nature of Metaphysical Thinking (London: Macmillan & Co., 1953), p. 4.

3 Much of the following criticism of Barth is equally appropriate to Bultmann. Barth makes "objective" metaphysical affirmations without considering or demonstrating why they should be believed to be true. Bultmann attempts to limit himself to "subjective" analysis, concentrating upon a clarification of Christian self-understanding, avoiding in so far as possible all metaphysical affirmations, but avoiding also the fact that every significant theological statement (including his own) has metaphysical implications. Both men are alike, however, in that they refuse to subject their declared or implied metaphysics to the kind of scrutiny which could commend them to belief. Consequently, it is impossible to determine whether the metaphysical affirmations, declared or implied, are grounded in the truth of reality or in the fantasy of the theologian. The distinction, however, is of crucial religious significance.

left with an answer which remains in doubt on the very basis of the experiences which give rise to the question in the first place. Barth's freedom from empirical fact amounts to a simultaneous isolation from the realities which alone could supply the coercive power that produces conviction. Thus, Barth's answer comes indeterminably close to being a logically and existentially meaningless answer, reading like counsels of optimism arbitrarily founded.[1]

Arbitrariness, however, short-circuits conviction, and renders meaningless its answers to the question of meaning. Therefore, a theological answer to the question of the meaning of life must reckon very seriously with the world of empirical fact. Man's existence is indeed too deep and profound to be limited to an empirical analysis (as in Wieman). Considerable reference must be made to symbols and myths in order that the full scope of experienced reality may be taken into account. But, there are areas of man's life which are clearly not beyond empirical analysis, and only gradually does the remaining totality of human experience fade into mystery. Therefore, any

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1 The considerable extent to which Barth's answer does escape the implied judgement is more of a tribute to Barth as a general scholar and a creative thinker than to his declared theological method.

attempt to deal with man theologically must be certain it comes to grips with the empirical facts as well as the symbols. Otherwise, facts will have no control over mythology, and theology's search for reality will be divorced from what is certain in reality, with the inevitable consequence that its answer to the question of the meaning of life will have no definable relationship to the meaning of this life (a considerable portion of which is composed of empirical experiences).

This points to the need for what John Macquarrie calls "realist metaphysics and theology."[1] The theologian must deal seriously with what is empirically known, not to support his own presuppositions (as in the old "proofs" of "natural theology"), but in order to inform them, and perhaps to transform them. Theology must be empirically oriented, grounded in what is certain in reality, not merely so as to be

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1 John Macquarrie, Twentieth-Century Religious Thought (London: SCM Press, 1963), Ch. XVII. Macquarrie includes consideration of C.H. Morgan, S. Alexander, A.N. Whitehead, C.E.M. Joad, N. Hartmann, W. Temple, L.S. Thornton, P. Teilhard de Chardin, C. Hartshorne, and A.C. Garnett. Classification is always difficult, but H.N. Wieman, B. Meland and even P. Tillich could be included. The ontology of Tillich's Systematic Theology is essentially a realist metaphysic - a scientifically informed, "panentheistic," process ontology.

believed, but so as to be accurate - and in the confidence that if it is accurate it will be believed.

The best theology, therefore (from the perspective of the question of the meaning of life), is a theology in dialogue with the scholarly world, speaking but also listening and learning. There must be no retreat into "freedom" from the disciplining influence of natural science and other areas of knowledge, for the convenience of such freedom is the convenience of arbitrariness, and so, the convenience of that which is destined to remain and should remain doubtful. A theology that is to be adequate for twentieth-century man must be philosophical theology, scientifically informed.

> We have no right to raise a passionate protest against...secularism..., so long as we are not in a position to propose...another conception of the universe and one in which nature and man appear [convincingly] in a different light....
>
> The fundamental question which is now to be debated is...the question whether for people of the present time, whose thought is shaped by the contemporary conception of the physical universe, any other philosophy is still possible than that of secularism.[1]

Any answer to the question of the meaning of life which does not allow itself to be considerably informed

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1 Karl Heim, Christian Faith and Natural Science, trans. by N. Horton Smith (London: SCM Press, 1953), pp. 24, 25. No one has sensed this aspect of the problem more profoundly, or stated it more clearly.

and determined by this profound insight is unlikely to be either accurate or persuasive.

III

That a satisfactory answer to the question of the meaning of life is dependent upon its being informed by and taking account of the facts of experience in order to be accurate and believed, points to the further observation that the facts of experience must be reckoned with in order to be relevant. Indeed, the question of the meaning of life is a question concerning the complex facts of experience which collectively compose human life. Unless this totality of experiences (empirical and numinous) is dealt with, it is difficult to see what "life" in an answer to the question of the meaning of life could possibly mean. A considerable portion of the criticism in the evaluation of each theologian's answer has been concerned with failure to take into account a significant area of human experience.

Thus, Barth's answer, which as religious symbol doubtless has power within the realm of the numinous, is undisciplined by empirical fact, untempered by the

realities of human experience. The result is that man, who experiences himself as a fact-conscious being, finds his fact-consciousness untouched by Barth's answer. Barth's effort to establish theology as an independent science results not only in its independence from verification and subsequently from relative or finite certainty, but also and simultaneously its independence from some of the very human experiences about which the question of the meaning of life is concerned. An answer which does not demonstrate its relation to empirical experience is likely to be irrelevant to empirical experience. Certainly its relevance is in doubt. The fact-conscious intellect is one of the experiences which compose human life,[1] and to ignore its concerns is not only to propose a doubtful answer, but to present what is necessarily a somewhat <u>irrelevant</u> one.

Similarly, the answers of most of the other theologians investigated were found to have a certain "fragmentary" character, either neglecting or intentionally ignoring (and thus being irrelevant to)

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1 It is, of course, <u>only one</u> of the experiences which compose life. It has received first and special attention because it is through the intellect that the question is formulated and that the answer (in so far as it is a scholarly, theological answer) must be received.

some important aspects of human life, some important complex of experiences which in unity with still other experiences compose human life. Bultmann suggested an existentialist answer, refusing to take into consideration an interpretation of the larger natural and historical complex, the question of the meaning of human life and history in general. Heim suggested an eschatologically oriented answer which tended to empty the present of meaning in looking to the future. Niebuhr suggested a prophetic answer, interpreting human life and history in terms of judgement and redemption, but leaving unexplored man's experience of himself as a phenomenon of nature and the implications of this fact for the question of the meaning of life. Wieman suggested an answer from the standpoint of theological empiricism, naturalism or realism (thus standing opposite Barth and committing, expectantly, the opposite error), intentionally ignoring the numinous (not as unimportant for religion but as impossible for theology), leaving unexplored the deepest levels of human experience about which the question of the meaning of life is qualitatively concerned. Only Tillich undertook a comprehensive consideration of the total

complex of experiences which compose human life, thus presenting the answer which was and is most truly and fully an answer.

The question of the meaning of life is asking theology to wrestle with the total complex of human experience. Again, therefore, it is necessary to observe that the best theology (from the perspective of the question of the meaning of life) is a theology in dialogue with other learned disciplines. There must be no retreat into "freedom" from the tempering influence of natural science and other areas of knowledge, for the convenience of such freedom is the convenience of irrelevance.[1] Only that theology which has honestly exposed itself to the broad spectrum of experienced reality has the possibility of

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1 The observation that a theology grounded in natural science is subject to the shifting winds and tides of learning is, indeed, true - but it is simply a fact, and certainly not an argument against such an undertaking. The significance of the observation is clarified by the further fact that no theologies in the history of Christian thought have totally escaped those winds and tides, and to the extent that they have they have been irrelevant and become anachronistic. Therefore, it is better to ride the storm than to drown in the illusion of being above it. That a theology which is wed to natural science may be subject to reconstruction every thirty years or so only indicates that its periodic revisions - which take place anyway - will have the possibility of being accurate and relevant.

generally understanding and being generally understood, and so of being a truly and fully relevant (meaning-ful) undertaking.

The question of the meaning of life is concerned with the complex of experiences which collectively compose human life, the relationship of these experiences to one another and to their source and goal. However great the task, it is this diversified and complex totality of human experience which is at issue when the question is asked. A helpful answer will not ignore any important area of experience, and to the extent that it does so it has ceased to be helpful, leaving that area of human life to be judged meaningless, and itself correspondingly irrelevant.

IV

The fullness of human experience must inform theology, but theology must interpret the fullness of human experience. The question of the meaning of life is asking for an <u>interpretation</u> of the diversified complex of experiences which compose human life, the <u>relationship</u> of these experiences to one another, and to their source and goal.

Indeed, the two words "interpretation" and "relationship" reveal what is basically at issue in this research - the meaning of "meaning" in the question of meaning. The fundamental concern, therefore, is for an interpretive principle of integration which provides insight into the actual integration present in reality - that which relates isolated experiences to one another in such a way as to produce the complex totality which is human life in its varied richness.

It was, of course, at this point that Bultmann offered such determined resistance, insisting that general interpretations rob the existential moment of its significance for the individual person. This approach, as has been indicated, overlooks the fact that the ruling "no interpretation" implies a devastating interpretation by default, and that a world which is beyond general interpretation must be something very much like a world of general chaos - without form and void. Furthermore, to refuse to undertake a general interpretation of reality is to deny interpretation to a very considerable area of human experience, and thus to abandon it to meaninglessness.

Man, who knows himself to be a part of the universe, seeks a general understanding of himself

in his relation to his world, and it is at least to be seriously questioned whether any man actually lives without some such general understanding (however confused it may be).

> Everyone today knows from experience that all responsible speech and action rests upon an overall picture of reality. It is only on the basis of this comprehensive view of the whole that we can make decisions in any specific matter, for it is only then that we see all the possibilities which are latent in this whole, in which, after all, all the single parts interact.[1]

The real issue, then, is never to interpret or not to interpret reality in general, but always what the interpretation (expressed or implied) will be, and how closely it will approach accuracy. It can not be shown, for example, that man's finitude or "historicity" limits his ability to interpret life in general (granted greater complexity) any more than it limits his general observation that all men are mortal. To suspend judgement permanently on the latter point (or the former) because one does not know all men or stand in the position of all men is to plead humility as a substitute for courage. Furthermore, as has been shown, the (in itself true) observation that man always undertakes his observations

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1 Karl Heim, Christian Faith and Natural Science, pp. 27, 28.

from a limited, finite perspective presupposes a transcendent perspective from which the general observation is made, and so amounts to an interesting (if ambiguous) refutation of itself. Only that which lies totally beyond man's perception lies totally beyond his ability to interpret, but man is not likely to be asking for an interpretation of that which is totally beyond his perception.

The question of the meaning of life is a question asking for an interpretation of the complex of experiences which compose human life, their meaning for one another and for their origin and destiny. Such an interpretation is made difficult by the twofold fact that: (1) a principle of interpretation is not immediately obvious; and (2) unless the proposed interpretation has an obviously correct character about it (suggestive of an interpretation implied in reality itself) it will not be convincing.

A principle of interpretation must, therefore, be grounded in empirical fact. For, unless it is thus grounded in what is certain, it is (as has been shown) both unbelievable and irrelevant (to that which is certain). The principle of interpretation must, however, transcend the purely empirical and verifiable, as reality considered as a whole transcends every

present state of knowledge. Unless such a transcending (ing to distinguish it from purely transcendent) principle is observed, no satisfactory answer can be given. For then, as with Wieman, the unknown tends to become unacknowledged, and a considerable area of human experience is, as Niebuhr noted, denied for the sake of a premature logical consistency.[1]

The necessity for such a transcending principle of interpretation which is nevertheless grounded in what is certain is a matter which was grasped, consciously or unconsciously (certainly in varying ways and with varying success) by most of the theologians studied. Bultmann's "eschatological existence," Heim's "leadership principle," Niebuhr's "love commandment," Wieman's "creative event," and Tillich's "New Being," all have something of a matter-of-fact character which, however obscure when considered ultimately, ties them to experienced reality. They can, in part, be described and discussed with any

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1 The position here suggested concerning a principle of interpretation is similar (formally) to the intention of Niebuhr as outlined on pp. 238 f. this paper. However, it must differ somewhat in content and application in appreciation of the criticism noted. It thus comes very close to the position of Tillich.

man of good will. Similarly, they all (including Wieman) have something of a transcending character which permits them to represent and bear the numinous. They therefore (in varying degrees)[1] qualify formally as the kind of principle of interpretation which is needful, touching the world of concrete fact while transcending it.

The Christian faith, of course, affirms that the true principle of interpretation exists in Jesus Christ. But, this affirmation is itself in need of interpretation, and, considered alone, is a generality which offers little to clarify the matter at issue. Granted the further necessity, therefore, of interpreting "Jesus Christ," each of the theologians considered would claim Christ as his principle of interpretation, and each would be, within the framework of his own thought, correct. The unity in the generality obscures the diversity in interpreting the principle of interpretation.

New Testament criticism of the past half century has made clear the difficulty implicit in a quest for the Jesus of history, and the extent to which factual

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1 The principle of interpretation must also have a universal character, applicable to the totality of human experience. It was at this point that so many weaknesses were noted.

type statements can be made about him, with the exception of the briefest outline, is considerably in question.[1] What can be known, however, is that the New Testament church experienced Jesus as the wisdom of God and the power of God - the bearer of the answer to the question of the meaning of life and the source of strength to live meaningfully.[2] The Christian principle of interpretation, therefore, is the meaning-ful life manifest in Jesus, experienced in power by the early church, and witnessed to in the New Testament. Jesus, as he was meaningful for the New Testament authors, in terms of their own understanding, is available for us as the Jesus of the gospels and the epistles. We can know something of what Jesus meant to them. So understood, the principle of interpretation is close to Tillich's New Being.

Now, it has not been the purpose of this project to define with precision how Jesus Christ, as a principle of interpretation, is to be understood.[3]

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1 James M. Robinson, The New Quest of the Historical Jesus (London: SCM Press, 1961).

2 I Cor. 1:24 "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." Also Niebuhr pp. 241, 251 this paper.

3 All that can be validly undertaken as a conclusion of this research is the formal suggestions which follow. The actual content as to how Jesus meaningfully interprets human experience within the formal framework suggested is the task of creative and constructive theology itself, and so is beyond the proper boundaries of this research.

But, the relevant conclusions born of this research point to the necessity that the principle of interpretation: (1) be related to and disciplined by the world of empirical fact and human experience (for otherwise there is no check upon the theologian's imagination, and no relevance to a considerable portion of human life); and (2) that it should transcend the exclusively empirical in such a way as to allow it to represent and bear the numinous (for otherwise the full scope of human life is not comprehended, and the full power present in reality will be unnecessarily and undesirably limited). In other words, a principle of interpretation which is only determined by the numinous becomes for the individual paralyzed by doubt and irrelevance; whereas, a principle of interpretation which is determined by the purely empirical becomes for the individual paralyzed by shallowness and (within another sphere) irrelevance. Truth and power come from a skillful balancing in tension by the systematic theologian of the empirical and the numinous as he seeks, by means of the meaning-ful life manifest in Jesus, an orderly understanding of the fundamental order of existence. The real issue, then, in a theological investigation of the question

of the meaning of life, is concerned with discovering a principle of interpretation which, when applied appropriately, provides insight into the actual integration and relationship of experiences present in reality - hence, the "meaning" of these experiences for one another and for the complex whole which is human life in its varied richness. The principle of interpretation must be comprehensive enough to be relevant for the totality of human experience (empirical and numinous), vital enough to mediate the redeeming power inherent in reality, and true enough to be convincing.

V

All of the research thus far has pointed in one direction: the question of the meaning of life is a question concerning a theological system[1] - the comprehensive, consistent, and responsible ordering for the intellect of the sum of human experiences in terms of a unifying principle which conforms

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1 It has not, of course, been the purpose of this work to make a comprehensive defense of the systematic structure, but to clarify what is implied in the question of the meaning of life - a clarification which points, from the perspective of the question under research, to the desirability of a theological system.

conceptually with the unifying factor present in reality, and which the church experiences as manifest in Jesus Christ. Such a theological system should: (1) seek to be comprehensive, interpreting in so far as possible the complex sum of human experience;[1] and (2) seek to be consistent, demonstrating logical and ontological relationships, showing the meaning of every experience in the perspective of others and of the whole.[2] Throughout such theological and philosophical construction it is to be presupposed that the theologian will (3) seek to be intellectually responsible, always submitting his tentative judgments to the discipline of logic, human experience, and the present state of general knowledge. For, unless this is done, the mind - the particular human faculty which formulates

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1 This is not intended to suggest the development of an actual summa (in the classical sense), though the difference is largely quantitative. Doubtless the twentieth century theologian can not deal with all the intricacies of specialized areas of knowledge, or all the idiosyncrasies of personal experience. His task, therefore, is to make appropriate generalizations about the more important experiences which compose human life - his personal discretion as well as the value of his answer being at issue in the choice. Theology, like philosophy, is properly concerned with "ultimate generalities." A.N. Whitehead, Process and Reality (Cambridge: The University Press, 1929), p. 11.

2 The emphasis upon empirical fact and human experience in this paper should make it clear that "systematic" and "consistent" are not intended to suggest "deductive."

the question - can not be expected to acknowledge the answer, and the answer will be correspondingly irrelevant.

It is, of course, true that theological systems have suffered eclipse during the first half of the twentieth century, and that conclusions in favor of a theological system are not in vogue. Contemporary theology is largely informed (and considerably determined) by a tradition which traces its modern origin to Sören Kierkegaard, who, in reaction against the claustrophobia-producing system of Hegel, suggested that in man's dealings with reality there can be no scientific systems but only Philosophical Fragments to which can be appended a Concluding Unscientific Postscript.[1] That such a proposal has a real validity when understood against its historical background is virtually uncontested today. But, it is particularly difficult to distinguish the validity in the protest from a tendency to exploit it as a sophisticated occasion for logical wrecklessness (perhaps weakly described as "dialectics") with unexamined and untested presuppositions, piously justified by the invoking of Tertullian's difficult

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1 Both books trans. by David F. Swenson (Princeton: The University Press, 1936).

reflection, "It is to be believed, because it is absurd."[1] Certainly, chaotic verbal ejaculations (whether or not heralded as "proclamation") arising from logical anarchy and unconcerned with the discipline of empirical fact do not contribute to developing a constructive and helpful answer to the question of the meaning of life - a life which has a considerable amount of empirical and testable content.

Now, if a man erects a theological system, consecrates it, and proceeds to live in it for the rest of his life as an officiating priest serving the temple, never venturing outside lest the light of day reveal to him the cracks in the foundation, and the freshness of the breeze whisper to him enchanting words of goodness, truth and beauty beyond the boundaries of his present life, this is a very different thing from having a well ordered theological home,

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1 Tertullian is referring to the crucifixion and resurrection of the Son of God. The actual quote is: "credibile est, quia ineptum est.... certum est, quia impossibile." "It is to be believed because it is absurd..., it is certain because it is impossible." Quintus S.F. Tertullian, "De Carne Christi," ch. 5, Tertulliani Opera (Turnholti: Typographi Brepoli Editores Pontificii, 1954), pars II, 881.

and is certainly not a system concerned to be empirical, dealing with all of the facts and actualities of life. If, on the other hand, and in the name of Abraham, a man attempts to live the life of a theological nomad, wandering aimlessly, pitching his intellectual camp where matters appear comfortable and moving when they threaten to become uncomfortable, neither cultivating an empirically and realistically oriented understanding of his own experiences nor coming to terms with the civilisation around him, this is a very different thing from being a responsible theologian. Such a man may, perhaps, spitefully claim that Jerusalem and not Athens is his home, but it is, in fact, particularly difficult to be certain that he has <u>any</u> home. What <u>is</u> then certain is that the problem of the <u>true</u> prophet becomes unnecessarily compounded and intensified for the orderly mind.

The question of the meaning of life is an existential question, arising from the whole of a man's existence, asking for a systematic, comprehensive and orderly interpretation of that existence, in all its breadth and depth. If the systematic answer does not adequately conceptualise experienced reality for the individual, then it is the particular system that

is at fault and must be discarded, not the comprehensive and systematic order itself. The question of meaning is asking for an honest and orderly theological home in which to live - not in retreat from reality but in active participation with it and as part of it. It is the quest by a man to get his bearings in the world. It presupposes the possibility of such a system, which meaningfully relates human experiences to one another and to their source and goal, to be latent in reality.

Honest and comprehensive systematic thinking "is the mark of a mind which has its philosophical material properly controlled and digested."[1] This judgement of R.G. Collingwood can be appropriately extended to include the observation that the question of the meaning of life is the question of a mind seeking to get its philosophical material properly controlled and digested. The question is not, therefore, a simple one which can be stilled by a simple declarative answer. Instead, it is the search of a soul for an honest understanding of life in the world, and this is a complex quest, calling

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1 R.G. Collingwood, The Idea of Nature (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1945), p. 183. I am indebted for this reference to John Macquarrie, Twentieth-Century Religious Thought, p. 276.

for a comprehensive and consistent interpretation of the manifold experiences which compose human life, the relationship of these experiences to one another, and to God as their source and goal.

VI

The question of the meaning of life is a question arising from the whole of a man's existence asking if that existence, in all its complexity and diversity, is comprehensible, or if it is but an enigma bounded at beginning and end by nothingness. A helpful answer to the question must:

1. seek to be <u>believable</u>, and believable not on the basis of credulity, but on the basis of empirically grounded accuracy, so that it is persuasive by virtue of the convincing character of its content. Any answer which can not be thus embraced by the intellect has failed to satisfy the very human faculty which formulates and asks the question of the meaning of life.
2. seek to be <u>relevant</u> to the total complex of human experience: the empirical, the existential, the personal, the historical, the natural, and the numinous. For it is this total complex which is represented by

the word "life" when the question of the meaning of life is raised.

3. seek to interweave the relationship of these experiences by means of a principle of interpretation which (hopefully) conforms conceptually with the actual integration present in reality. For it is the actual integration of these experiences - their relationship to one another and to the whole - which is represented by "meaning" when the question of the meaning of life is asked.

4. seek to be comprehensive, consistent, and responsible systematic theology. For the question of the meaning of life is not asking for a simple declarative answer, but for an orderly understanding of the fundamental order in reality. It is therefore in the fullest sense a question for theo-logy - inquiring about the rational structure (logos) of creation as it is grounded in God.

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